The Space of the Screen and Contemporary Ambivalence; an innovative analysis of contemporary painterly pictorial construction.

by
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Submitted in the fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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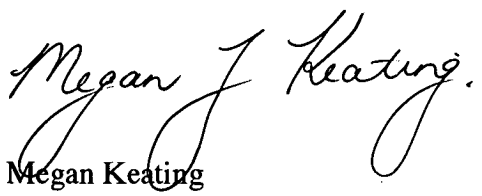

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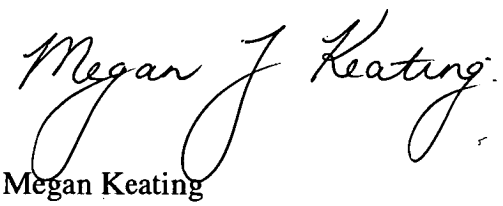

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Abstract

This research project examines the nature of pictorial space within contemporary painting. It proposes, through the use of a studio-based investigation, a new condition of spatial construction that has been interpreted through the representational methodologies of the screen. It argues that the screen has become a dominant paradigm in the creation and articulation of an ambivalent condition of spatiality. This ambivalent condition is suggested in a body of painterly works as a closed cycle of movement in which objects and detail are dislocated within/on the pictorial plane whilst concurrently grounded in an illusion of reality. This project also establishes a perception of anxiety and spatial unease as being indicative of contemporary experience. This is instituted through the concept of something being a guise for "Nothing" and "Nothing" being a comment on contemporary experience. It argues that the something of "Nothing" is also a context for "otherness". The principle vehicle for this investigation is the inanimate figurine (toy soldier). It is used, within this context, as a paradoxical object from popular culture; it alludes to the current climate of unrest and quotes from propaganda imagery and other military representations within visual culture.

The analysis of pictorial space was initiated through observation and interpretation of painting practices and it was within this examination that a definition of the screen was located. The screen is defined as a methodology of literal and metaphorical representations that are part of an on-going evolution in pictorial construction. These practices are discussed under the related areas of the flat/deep space of the screen; the screen as a literal painterly boundary; and the screen as a metaphorical barrier. Other issues that are considered here are a re-definition of flatness; the allusion to "otherness"; and the perception of anxiety

and unease in contemporary painting. This research has developed practical strategies that contextualize these issues by subverting traditional notations of figure/ground relationships. They include both technical and conceptual applications such as the concurrent use of a variety of spatial paradigms, decoration (camouflage patterning), the cut-out silhouette, an original paint surface (the mica glaze/ pearl surface) and an overall sense of spatial compression within the pictorial plane.

Acknowledgements

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PART ONE: THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT

The Space of the Screen

... through one pictorial device or another the greatest percentage of the world's painting has dealt with the representation of space.[1]

For the last 100 years perceptual modalities have been and continue to be in a state of perpetual transformation, or, some might claim, a state of crisis. [2]

Introduction

Many of the major advances in the pictorial arts have centred on the process of describing illusionistic conventions. That is - through technology, research or discovery - the visual arts have primarily concerned themselves with the articulation and rendering of space. The representation of space principally implies the artifice of depth on and within the picture plane. From the mathematical laws of perspective, to the photographic image, and the extremes of virtual reality, the rendering of pictorial space has become a dominant paradigm within the visual regime. Currently within visual culture there appears to be a resurgence of interest in this area. It seems only natural that painting too has espoused its own exploration into spatiality and it is within such a context that this investigation sits. It positions contemporary painting as the principle vehicle for the discussion and it proposes an interpretative reasoning for this renewed interest.

The principle objective of this research project is to examine pictorial space within contemporary painting. It declares that the literal and metaphorical connotations of the screen have resulted in an ambivalent condition of spatiality and it suggests that this ambivalent condition of spatiality is indicative of contemporary experience. By investigating the influence of the screen and screen technologies, within painterly construction, this project propounds

[1] Seliz, William. *Hans Hofmann,* New York, Doubleday, 1963.
[2] Crary, Jonathan. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Cambridge, (Mass), MIT Press, 1999, p.13.

that such imagery and technologies have played a pivotal role in our understanding and development of pictorial space. It maintains that the screen is integral to this argument and is not an independent apparatus or metaphor that has emerged within a modern or contemporary technological era.

The space of the screen is one that has always tempered our vision of imagery and the externalized world.[3] The screen within pictorial construction can be seen as passive *and* productive, dominant *and* submissive, subjective *and* objective and it is this polarized standing that establishes it as the unexpected and apprehensive muse of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, the space of the screen is not one that favours contemplation. It usually asserts an active and "de-corporealised vision"[4] that subverts as much as it makes explicit; conceals as much as it displays; filters as much as it projects and disguises as much as it reveals. Through the subversion of its vision a sense of loss or emptiness is fostered. This as Jacques Lacan implies in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*[5] is also an insufficiency or void. The screen is only capable of exhibiting or isolating one part of a larger whole at any given moment,[6] but unlike Plato's cave dwellers, experience has revealed that there is more here than is usually seen.

In thus participating in the methodology of the screen we are always left with the questions: is there anything else? What comes next? What is beyond? What is the alternative? Even within the interface of the digitalized screen, there is always something more out their, another web–site, another game, and another link. The light or illumination of the screen escalates this very response. By its very nature, the screen decrees the anticipation of the "other". Nevertheless, the "other" is not so easily defined in this scenario. We know it is there, but it may not be the foreseen consequence.

[3] This is described later within this text as the screen or veil of traditional perspectival construction; the screen as a window into another realm; through drawing aids and lenses; or as a surface on which images are displayed.
[4] Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer, on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century,* Cambridge (Mass), MIT Press, 1990, p.39.
[5] Lacan, Jacques. *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Alan Sheridan, (trans), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977, p.107.
[6] As described in Chapter One, *Towards a definition of 'screen'*.

The screen as a mask[7] reinforces this idea. The mask covers or hides a true reality and through this deception, unease is solicited because we are made to feel vulnerable through the deception. In addition, although the screen is capable of suspending belief and alluding to reality we are never quite sure the degree of distortion or duplicity. The screen thus misconstrues any sense of reality, presents a mediated abstraction of the external world as it confines, and frames a vision that is ephemeral and transient.

Not only has it advanced from a metaphorical reading of pictures, which lead the viewer along the path of the artist's intention and inner vision but it has also concretely manifested itself as formal articulations (alternative perception of flatness) in contemporary image making processes. Through the technological screen, or the screen as an "historically constructed artefact,"[8] pictorial space has shifted towards a polarized construction in which representation is mediated by abstraction and flatness is mediated by illusion. As presented in the medium of painting the screen has altered the interpretation of spatial practices and developed an appearance that can only be described as familiarity with an edge. Within this reading, of simultaneous comfort and unease, contemporary art practices have become a critical sounding ground for the expression of contemporary anxieties - anxieties that are founded by the very sources of the influence - technology and the screen.

Project Outline

The argument within this research has been sketched generally and does not begin to suggest that the following discourse is at all conclusive or exact. Its intention is to give an overview of some of the concerns that have prompted the studio-based investigation. For these reasons applications such as the use of the photographic image and its influence on painting and time-based and multi-dimensional media may appear to be oversights in the investigation. However as the research is primarily initiated through my own studio investigation I have only concentrated on those applications

[7] *ibid.*
[8] Crary, *op.cit.*, p.27.

and methodologies that are pertinent to that practice. It is acknowledged that many of these areas have displayed dramatic and resounding influences on the applications of contemporary spatiality but the scope of this project is unable to extrapolate upon them. In the initial stages of research I wrote lengthy chapters on how the screen was a prominent strategy in the development of perspective, in drawing aids such as the camera obscura and camera lucida and in photography. This research, although relevant to the overall concerns of the project, did not really address the strategies developed within the studio-investigation. It was thus decided that a simpler approach be taken that directed the focus back on to artistic practice. Thus, much of this dissertation involving the screen and pictorial construction, is located in a discussion of other artist's work. Such influences have been alluded to in the choice of artists discussed such as the use of photography in Richard Patterson's work or digitization in the work of Chuck Close.

In a general discussion of pictorial space and painting, two different models exist; there is either an historical *or* an interpretive analysis. One is an investigation through the chronicles of history and the other is an alternative interpretation of that procedure. This paper does not seek to give a narrative account of the genealogy of pictorial space but does acknowledge the relevance of an historical model in relation to the interpretative methodology. Therefore, through a brief documentation of history, the interpretive model is not only given chronological relevance but acknowledges that this model is not isolated, nor is it unique. It is however used in this argument to highlight the significant differences between what has been defined as 'contemporary' and 'traditional'. In addition, the interpretative model is not constructed as an isolated break with tradition but as an on-going development in pictorial fabrication. Hence, the articulation of history is fundamental to the comprehension of contemporary pictorial space and therefore to the parameters of this argument.

The core is structured within an interpretative model of current pictorial trends (through the agency of painting). The screen is defined as a literal and metaphorical boundary, or separation, with

Lacan's interpretation of it as a "camouflage"[9] forming the central theoretical discourse. A general historical investigation illustrated by an interpretation of Caravaggio's paintings, briefly outlines the genealogy of these ideas. Caravaggio then provides a comparison for the second half of the argument - the discussion of contemporary painting practices. As this argument was formulated through a broad examination of such practice the artists discussed within these chapters are critical to the overall construction and development of the project. Six diverse contemporary painters are examined. They plot three relationships between painting and the screen, which, in turn, suggests an alternative condition of spatiality. The first two of these are presented as having a direct relationship with the technological screen, and the third is an indirect reference previously insinuated by the historical exemplar. They are as follows: Fabian Marcaccio and Inka Essenhigh and their association to the flat/deep space of the screen; Chuck Close and Richard Patterson and the use of the screen as a literal painterly boundary; Lisa Yuskavage and Louise Hearman and the enunciation of the screen as a metaphorical separation.

This project also aims to discuss other issues that appear within the current dialogue surrounding image making, and, in doing so, to offer a possible interpretation for the perceived shift in contemporary painterly pictorial construction. Such issues include; why contemporary images appear familiar but uneasy; why this unease is so difficult to locate; why contemporary images seem to be both simultaneously engaging and disengaging; and how concepts such as "otherness" are alluded to within this context. In questioning the formal characteristics of contemporary painting this investigation also aims to re-define "flatness" within this paradigm. Finally it aims to discuss the use of ambivalence and anxiety as a strategically driven trope.

Within the studio-based practice the aim of this investigation is not to create images that refer to or "look" like other screen images but to establish the screen as a complex relationship of strategies that maintain a dominant position within the constructional methodologies of contemporary painting. The objective of the

[9] Lacan, *op.cit.*

project, then, is to use the influence of the screen as a representational procedure; to construct practical strategies that implement these procedures within my own practice; and to illustrate how this is also applied within other artistic practices.

Chapter One:

Towards a definition of 'screen'

A screen is described as any structure or system that separates, cuts-off or disconnects - such as a covered frame that functions as a partition or division. The same partition also serves as a filter or sieve that isolates one entity from another. The screen is also described as a surface on which visible images are formed or displayed.[10] The same is true of a metaphorical interpretation and a similar analogy can be seen, in a comparison with the camera obscura. The screen, like the camera obscura, is less a machine or "assemblage", than a complex set of associations. It is "...an object about which something is said and at the same time an object that is used [and] a site at which a discursive formation intersects with material practices".[11] Thus the characteristics of the screen can be summarized as a mediation that cuts off, divides, separates or disconnects as well as filters, confines, frames and displays.

A screen-based image therefore is any image constructed by the application of a screen. The filtering or distilling strategies of the screen imposes borders or limitations upon a view or sight and a screen-based image is the result. By this definition, a screen-based image is any image that is viewed through another medium by the illumination of that image.[12] Any medium that frames as well as distorts, diffuses, focuses or projects a vision can be considered a screen-based apparatus. For example, the image that is framed in a piece of tracing paper (held up to a view) would be defined as a screen-based image. The fragment of the view that leaks out behind the edges of the paper is still a vision of reality but the part of the view that is captured within the confines of the paper has passed through a medium. If it produced an alternative representation of that view the tracing paper would be considered to be a *screen-based device* or *technology* as this medium has in

[10] The Macquarie Dictionary, 2nd Revised Edition.
[11] Cray, *op.cit.*, p.30-31.
[12] This point indicates that some sort of light source is the principle cause of illumination and is imperative to the viewing of images on and through a screen.

some way transformed the initial vision and captured it (however fleetingly) in a confined area. Even the image viewed within a windowpane can be considered a screen-based image and the windowpane a screen-based apparatus or device. The window-frame or edge confines/contains the sight and the glass functions as a medium that filters (however slightly) the original vision. From this definition any view seen through a device that frames, filters or distorts can be described as *screen-based technologies*. Such devices or technologies include optical apparatuses or machinery, cameras, as well as electronic and digital devices such as television, video, film and computers.

Concealment: Lacan, the screen, the gaze and the "other".

Lacan in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* describes the screen as a "mask", a "double", an "envelope", and a "thrown-off skin",[13] that determines how the gaze, the object and subject are "seen". In Lacan's explanation of the screen as an "envelope", the screen encloses the subject and protectively confines the image. As a "mask" Lacan insinuates that the screen conceals or hides the essential meaning, this is emphasized by the use of the metaphor "double". "Double" implies an assumed appearance rather than a specific one. The final comparison Lacan uses is a "thrown-off skin" which evokes a rejection, a discharging or enshrouding of the image. This comparison suggests that the screen is a type of camouflage that can be discarded at will and whose primary purpose is to subvert rather than make manifest. Lacan goes on to add " the screen is...the locus of mediation" between "the human subject [and] the subject of the desire that is the essence of man" who is also entirely captured by the imaginary apprehension of the gaze.[14]

This description appears pertinent within the current dialogue surrounding painting, which seems to be revisiting the Lacanian discourse of the gaze in relationship to an implied reality.[15] Lacan connects the gaze not within the position of observer but within the

[13] Lacan, *op.cit.*
[14] *ibid.*
[15] See Ross, Toni. "Staging the Gaze in the Art of Anne Wallace" in *Recent Paintings/Anne Wallace*, Brisbane, Arts Queensland, 1999 for a discussion on locating the gaze in contemporary painting.

imagined position of reality. The observer is united with the screen through the creation of a blind spot within the visual regime. The gaze consequently marks a gap or an emptiness within the proposed representation as well as highlighting an indeterminate locality. This restricts the possibility of allocating to the gaze any specific meaning or appearance. Slavoj Zizek further adds to Lacan's argument by stating that the presence of the gaze anticipates a void or lack of being; this interpretation emphasizes Lacan's idea of emptiness and bestows the screen with a metaphysical intention that anticipates a transcendental association.[16] This means that the screen can be seen as the intersection of social and historical abstractions of reality. This intersection is made explicit by the implication of the human subject. The reality described however is a diverse one because the image it defines is transient and ephemeral. The ephemeral nature of such images anticipates "other" temporal associations. These are also relative to Zizek's metaphysical intentions and to ideas pertaining to utopian ideals, spirituality and a sense of transcendence of the unknown.

The disembodiment of screen vision

The screening of reality through current technology creates a sensory lag or a gaze that is essentially removed from the boundaries of the body. This lag is derived from the filtration that the medium forces upon an image and the separation of the gaze from the body of the viewer. For example, to take a photograph with a camera, the camera is held up to the eye and the experience of the body, of vision and of the event, become one. When placing a digital camera or video on a tripod and viewing the event through the screen, there is not the same correlation between the body and vision. Technology and the body are no longer a homogenized unit (as in holding the apparatus up to the eye); the apparatus is now pointed at the image/action and the eye is fixed on the screen which

[16] See Zizek, Slavoj. *The Plague of Fantasies* , London and New York, Verso, 1997 and Zizek, Slavoj. " I Hear You With My Eye", in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, (ed.), Renata Salecl, and Slavoj Zizek, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1996 for further interpretation of Lacan's notion of the gaze.

captures the imagery, rather than the experience itself. In this process the transformation of experience to imagery yields a strange new perspective that exists outside the parameters of the body. This perspective allows the screen to be independent from the act of viewing and offers a variation, which might appear to be slight, but which has had major ramifications on contemporary image-making practices.[17] This new subjectivity has been critical in the evolution of pictorial conventions as it not only questions the relationship between the external world and the autonomous viewer but allows the autonomous viewer to look upon the external world without being part of, or engaged with, its representation.

The distinction made between the act of looking, and the process of mechanical/technical image capture, can also be extended to the indexical process of artistic representation. This act is one of transformation and translation. The image derived through observation however is always privy to a degree of integration. As any image is perpetually confined by pre-existing models of representation .[18] In the extension of technology from the body, the image becomes the new model for that body. The image of media and the image of artistic process thus influence the image of experience because "...in everyday life we experience our internalized sense of "self" forever restructured, alienated, and divided from its image by forces of the new media." [19] This disengagement or separation results in a modulated anxiety as the materialization of such images limits the contradiction between representation, reality and vision - an anxiety that is tempered by its very source.

A brief history

The screen (in all its semblances) however, is not a new phenomenon. Such principles and characteristics have been long known and can be traced beyond Antiquity. The genealogy of the

[17] This vision dislocates the image from an experience of reality. It could be said that a sense of detachment and coolness are explicit in such imagery. This detachment is a direct ramification of the confining and filtering strategies of the screen.
[18] Smith, Terry. *Impossible Presence, surface and screen in the photogenic era,* Sydney, Power Publications, 2001, p.147.
[19] *ibid.*, p.156.

screen as a device in the organization/construction of pictorial space has been a part of art history since well before the Quattrocento. It has been only recently, however, that the significance of its influence has been comprehended. The screen has now been isolated as an independent apparatus for the re-presenting and viewing of reality. Like the camera obscura, whose principles had also been established for well over two thousand years, the screen has been used as part of the representational methodologies of many imagining technologies. Jonathan Crary makes the distinction between the methodology of an image being produced in this way, and the camera obscura as an "historically constructed artefact".[20] Why then, did the camera obscura not become an "historically constructed artefact" until the seventieth century? Geoffrey Batchen also asserts that photography as well as film were viable options well before their respective claimants filed their inventions. " At what moment did the desire ...emerge and begin insistently to manifest itself? ...at what moment did...[the] shift from an occasional, isolated individual fantasy" become " a demonstrably widespread social imperative?"[21] Could not the same question be asked about the genealogy of the screen? Why then did the screen not become " a historically constructed artefact" until the twentieth century? And how has this delay altered the images produced by that screen?

As already stated, technologies have always aided and influenced vision and our perception of the natural world.[22] From the shadows of Plato's dancing figures caught on the cave-wall to the innovations of perspectival imagery during the Renaissance, the screen has presented us with ways of looking at, and, defining our physical environment. It has allowed the viewer to stand outside his environment and give new insight or meaning to the everyday.

Through the principles of perspective the first major re-structuring of pictorial space occurs. Panofsky opens *Perspective as Symbolic Form* by describing how Dürer sought to explain the concept of

[20] Crary, Jonathan. *op. cit.*, p.27.
[21] Batchen, Geoffrey. *Burning with Desire, The Conception of Photography*, Cambridge (Mass), MIT Press, 1997, p.36.
[22] This idea has recently been re-visited in current discourse. See footnote 32 of this chapter for further details.

perspective through the definition of the Latin word "perspectiva"- to see through.[23] Panofsky outlines a broader definition of perspective as "...the capacity to represent a number of objects together with a part of the space around them in such a way that the conception of the material picture support is completely supplanted by the conception of a transparent plane through which we believe that we are looking into an imaginary space".[24]

In *On Painting*, Alberti advises that a "screen" be erected as a device to aid the draughtsman in his quest to render nature. He recommends this "screen" to be made of a translucent cloth divided into squares. "It is like this: a veil loosely woven of fine thread, dyed whatever colour you please, divided up by thicker threads into as many parallel square sections as you like, and stretched on a frame. I set this up between the eye and the object to be represented, so that the visual pyramid passes through the loose weave of the veil".[25] By the use of the "screen" Alberti can effectively enclose his view and from a fixed point, translate the object or view to be copied onto a drawing surface (Fig. 1). Alberti goes on to say that " a painting will be the intersection of a visual pyramid at a given distance, with a fixed centre and a certain position of lights, represented by art with lines and colours on a given surface"[26] (Fig. 2).

The window or "screen" model of perspective maintains that the division of a plane constructs a "visual pyramid", which is perpendicular to the axis of sight. The apex of the pyramid is the

[23] Panofsky, Erwin. *Perspective as Symbolic Form,* New York, Zone Books, 1991, p.27.
[24] *ibid.*, p.77. Panofsky makes the distinction between "antique perspective" which is described as an "unmodern conception of the world" and "modernity, which demands and realizes, "a systematic space". Previous ages or Panofsky's " unmodern conception of the world" inferred that pictorial construction relied on metaphorical and symbolic allusion; scale/ proportion; and light contrast to not only structure images but to highlight specific intentions. See Bunim, Miriam, S. *Space in Medieval Painting and the Forerunners of Perspective*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1940, for a detailed description of pictorial space prior to the invention of perspective.
[25] Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting,* Cecil Grayson, (trans), Harmondsworth, Penguin Classics, 1991, p.65.
[26] *ibid.*, p.48.

eye. The distance of the intersection from the fixed point or eye will affect the scale of the view but not the proportion of that view. He goes on to add that "[s]hould (they) wish to try their talents

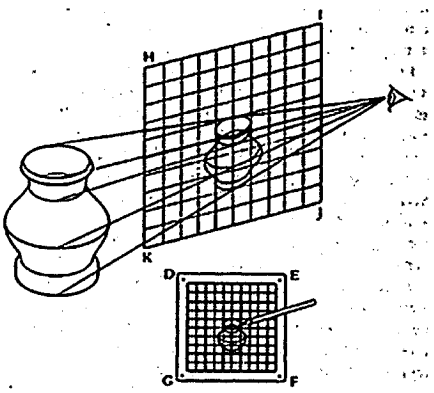

Fig. 1. *The 'Veil.'*

HIJK: veil divided into squares by thicker threads.
DEFG: drawing surface divided into the same number of squares as in the veil. The points at which the image of the object intersects the square grid are noted, and equivalent points are transcribed on to the square drawing surface.

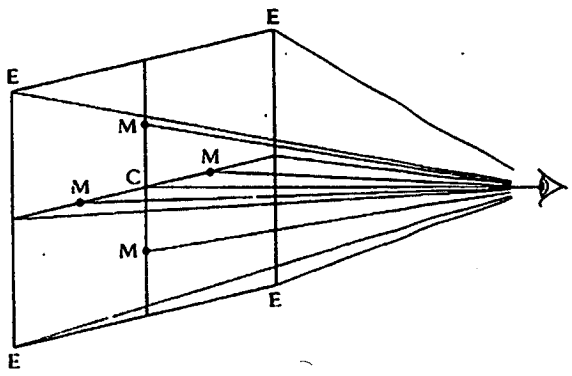

Fig. 2. *The Visual Pyramid.*

C: points at which the centric ray strikes the plane.
M: points at which the median rays strike the plane.
E: points at which the extrinsic rays touch the outer boundaries of the plane.

without the veil, they should imitate this system of parallels with the eye, so that they always imagine a horizontal line cut by a perpendicular at the point where they establish in the picture the edge of the object they observe."[27] Here Alberti clearly defines the methodology of perspective as derived from the window or "screen" model. Although Panofsky tells us "...that the conception of the material picture support is completely supplanted by the conception of a transparent plane through which we believe that we are looking ...",[28] we can automatically assume the significance of Alberti's exemplar even though the "transparent plane" may be eliminated.

[27] *ibid.*, p.67.
[28] Panofsky, Erwin. *op.cit.*, p.77.

The laws of perspective certainly did change the way in which objects were rendered in pictorial space[29] but it did not alter the way in which the world was viewed. These artists were "less pre-occupied with the rationalization of vision than the rationalization of representation".[30] For the first time in the epistemology of western pictorial space a realistic illusion of three-dimensionality was achieved. According to Panofsky, the aim of perspective was "to blend what was a multiplicity of individual objects ...into a true unity. This new unity... was arrived at only by smashing the existing unity: that is by consolidating and isolating objects which were once bound by corporeal and gestural as well as spatial and perspectival ties".[31] It may have developed into a logical and mathematically ordered methodology but perspective's origins lay in the simple act of observation through a screen. The fixed viewpoint of the veil or glass enabled artists to reflect a world in which man was modelled against real time and real space.

Perspective, thus, ordered a single viewpoint of the perceivable world with the human body at its centre. The purpose was to command a unified space in which human experience was the measure of all things.

Perspective, through the influence of the screen, became the dominant methodology for the articulation of space. Other representational devices also derived from the influence of the screen aided in the rendering of perspectival space, and they too, became popular tools. Artists used lenses and optical instruments as a way of capturing and confining the image as well as projecting that image onto other surfaces.

[29] As a result of Alberti's theories in linear perspective, pictorial construction was focused around the articulation of an illusion of real space - i.e. as a representation of reality. Space was organized within the pictorial plane as a definite enunciation of foreground, middle-ground and distance. This was achieved by a single fixed viewpoint from which radiating lines were drawn. This system also developed other perspectival illusions. That is by allowing shape and form to be graded in scale from large to small; volume to move from flatness to solidity; colour to be separated into warmer tones in the foreground and cooler tones towards the background; detail to be focused towards the perimeter of the painting surface and blurred towards the back; as well as higher contrast of light and dark in the foreground and less contrast moving towards the background. These strategies accomplished an overall sense of pictorial unity for the first time.

[30] Damisch, Herbert. *The Origin of Perspective,* John Goodman, (trans), Cambridge (Mass), MIT Press, 1994, p. 36.

[31] Panofsky, Erwin. *op.cit.*, p. 47-48.

Instruments such as; the camera lucida, perspectival grids and drawing screens (Fig. 3), for making silhouette portraits and the Claude glass; were not only used to view reality but also to record and document it.[32] The invention of photography had major

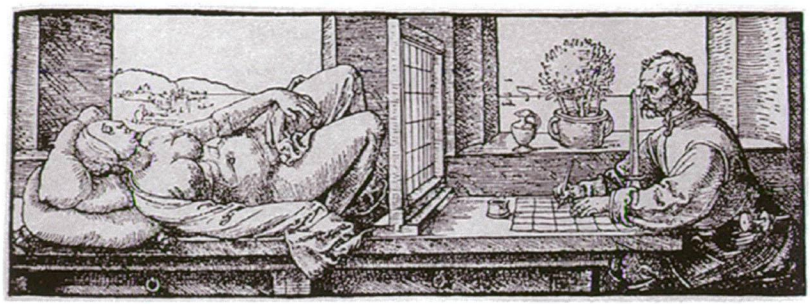

Fig. 3. Albrecht Dürer, Woodcut from *Underweysung der Messung*, 2nd ed., 1538.

repercussions not only for the field of representation but also for the way in which reality was perceived.[33] The image seen through the viewfinder or within the screen of the above listed image technologies literally re-defined the way in which the world was

[32] Although the outlines of this project do not extend to an in-depth discussion of this point, current discourse has established this as a relevant theory. David Hockney in the study *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters,* London, Thames and Hudson, 2001 argues that there are three types of pictorial construction. The first is derived by mathematical and geometric order as applied through perspective, the second is through observation and re-construction, accompanied by painterly gesture which includes artists such as Cezanne and Picasso and the third is through the use of lenses. He states artists as early as 1430 were using lenses, as well as the camera obscura as devices to aid in representation. It has also become widely accepted that Vermeer used the camera obscura from around the seventeenth century. See Fink, Daniel. "Vermeer's use of the Camera Obscura - A Comparative Study", *Art Bulletin,* Vol. LIII, No. 4, December 1971 and Steadman, Phillip, "Vermeer and the Camera Obscura: some practical considerations", *Leonardo,* Vol. 32, No. 2, 1999. Also see Kemp, Martin. *The Science of Art, Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat,* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1990, Chapter Five for a detailed description of other optical instruments and aids. In these listed articles, the argument is substantiated that perspective tools and aids had been in common use for centuries.

[33] Walter Benjamin in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" says that photography overturned the judgement of art - a fact which the discourse of Modernism found it necessary to repress. He goes further to add that technology has not just influenced art but been consequential in transforming it as well.

viewed.[34]

Either by capturing and describing an image through another medium, by providing a surface on which an image could be captured, or simply by separating one environment from another the screen is congenial (and has always been congenial) to visual culture. Through the screen, the representation of reality takes on an exaggerated clarity that is the result of a simple framing and filtering strategy. The screen displaces meaning by turning the act of looking into a process of viewing, and the act of viewing into a disembodied gaze. The screen, thus, becomes the conduit for an experience of reality and the visual abstraction of it.

Painting as Screen: Caravaggio's interiority

The screen was not only a pivotal apparatus in developing the laws of perspective, but it also materialized the support onto which that external vision of the world was projected. On being "captured" within the confines of the painting screen, the externalized vision of reality became an internalized imaginary image. The traditional painting surface became the site of intersection between the external reality of the world and an internal illusion of an image

[34] The principle element that all these apparatuses and technologies have in common is that in the framing of an image of reality, that image is one that has been flattened onto a two-dimensional plane. At this junction, photography became the culmination of this flirtation with technology, as it not only captured reality in a two-dimensional plane, but produced a fixed and permanent image of that reality (without the mark of the artist's hand). For the first time since the Renaissance, pictorial construction took on a new impetus. This developed into two major shifts; firstly the artist was no longer engaged with concepts and ideals pertaining to representations of reality as the photograph could capture these aspects with greater clarity. This was particularly poignant within portraiture. (See Coke, Van Deren. *The Painter and the Photograph from Delacroix to Warhol,* New Mexico, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1964, Chapter One and Two on portraiture for further insights on this shift.) This allowed the artist to become engaged in concepts or ways of viewing the world that could not be found within a representation of reality such as individual perception and later abstract conceptions such as time. Secondly, the flattening of reality within a two-dimensional plane and the move away from representation enabled the artist to engage with the surface of the pictorial plane. There were general shifts to an overall flattened spatial construction as artists were no longer compelled to make the painting a 'window' or illusion to the outside world. This resulted in formal articulations such as; how paint was applied, colour, light, texture, and process to be more important than verisimilitude.

of that world. It follows then that, the metaphor of painting as screen, can be perceived as a barrier or partition between one world and the next. This metaphor is made explicit in Caravaggio's work, which expresses a cautionary warning to those contemplating passing through this boundary. The figures that dare venture near the boundary of this illusion are quickly and sometimes violently drawn back into the dark spaces of Caravaggio's inward focused vision. The black amphorous voids of his compositions allude to this imaginary internalization and it is here that the heroes and the righteous reside.

Caravaggio's works present a startling illustration of the metaphorical interpretation of the representation of the external world and the comprehension of that world through to an imagined vision. By cropping the figure in brutally close positions Caravaggio has forced them into the viewer's space; but in doing so he excludes all other elements and then goes one step further and fills the emptiness with blackness. This blackness becomes the intangible boundary of the inner recesses of Caravaggio's mind. Here we are witness to the passing from the actual world of reality (alluded to as the figures try to break the seal of the picture plane), to the illusionistic world of images (where the victorious figures stand) and through into the unknown world of imagined blank spaces.[35] The first barrier is protected by the screen of the picture plane and the second through an illusionistic screen of darkness. It is here that the screen metaphor operates to conceal as well as to reveal. These images have a focused intensity that has also been described as " a movie-like close-up". [36] But it could be said that the "movie-like close up" is just another description for the manner in which the screen composes and mediates imagery.

[35] Caravaggio achieves this illusion by placing all the action and figures in the foreground. He pushes them up against the surface of the pictorial plane by isolating them from the background. A cloak of darkness separates the figures from the interior of the painting and they remain there in the contained shallow pictorial space. By rendering form with a sharp contrast of painterly dark and light instead of placing emphasis on linear, and silhouetted forms as in early sixteenth century techniques - see Friedlaender, Walter. *Caravaggio Studies*, New York, Schocken, 1969, p.15 for further discussion on this - Caravaggio never loses sight of the entire form or solidity of the figure, even when it is concealed by the darkness.

[36] Moir, Alfred. *Caravaggio,* New York, Thames and Hudson, 1989, p.112.

In Caravaggio's work *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*, 1602 (Fig. 4), Matthew is expectantly kneeling on a stool at the edge of the picture plane; his stool precariously enters the spectator's space. He seems pensive, nervous, even unsettled in his pose, as if

Fig. 4. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*, 1602.

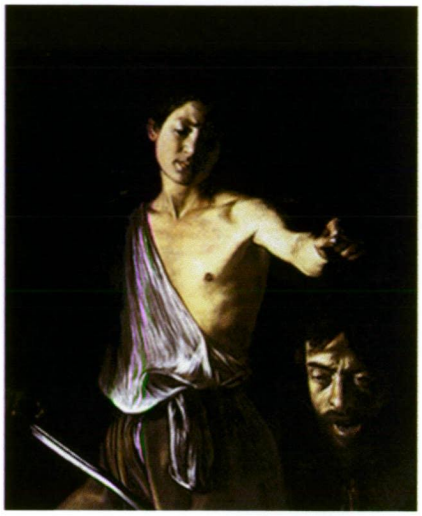

Fig. 5. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *David and the Head of Goliath*, 1609.

he may leap up at any moment and flee from his writing. But to do so would mean he would have to leave his internalized world and pass through the barrier of the painting screen. An angel hovering above and slightly in front of him, has emerged but still remains partially secluded within the "syrupy" blackness. His words are soothing as he keeps Matthew at his task and away from the light of the unknown external plane.

However, Goliath and John the Baptist have paid dearly for their wanderings beyond the screen of the painting surface and the screen of darkness. In *David and the Head of Goliath*, 1609 (Fig. 5), the youthful figure of David is morose as he stands defiantly in a position of justice. In his right hand the sword is concealed by the safety of the looming dark and, in his left, the head of Goliath, which he has just severed from the invisible body. It appears that, from the protection of the darkness, David has reached through the screen of the surface and grabbed the escapee Goliath, who appears to have paid a high price for his excursion into the external world!

John the Baptist, too, in *Salome,* 1609 (Fig. 6), has likewise been penalized for passing through the barrier of the painting screen. The defiant executioner extends his arm forward to display the tragic head of John. He too, is still sheltered by the empty void of the background. Salome looks away out of the picture plane but is framed by the darkness around her. She is unmoved by the events but conspires with the darkness as she contemplates the penalty of leaving the pictorial void.

Fig. 6. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Salome,* 1609.

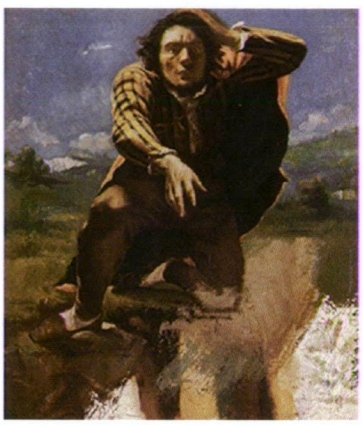

Fig. 7. Gustave Courbet, *Man Mad with Fear,* 1843.

In the essay "Embodying the Real", Anthony Bond reiterates this metaphor in his discussion on Courbet's self-portrait *Man Mad with Fear,* 1843 (Fig. 7). He describes the action of the image as "the artist pressing up against the pictorial surface or the frame of the composition as if he was about to burst through the viewer's side of the canvas."[37] Here, the artist is set to leap out of the plane of the picture's surface and into the "the pictorial void". The void being represented by the unfinished area of cliff in the right hand side of the image. It is in this act that Courbet attempts to "dissolve the border between representation and the real world".[38] Yet the boundaries already seem to be breaking down in the unpainted areas and "[r]epresentation is seen dissolving in front of our eyes".[39] In these examples painting as screen not only marks the separation between the external world of reality *and* the internal world of the imagination through representational illusion but also

[37] Bond, Anthony. "Embodying the Real" in the catalogue *Body*, Bookman Press and The Art Gallery of NSW, 1997, p.52.
[38] *ibid.*

provides the location from which both worlds can concurrently exist.

The contemporary screen

There is no denying that the screen dramatically altered the way in which the world was viewed: this was fundamentally the result of placing the ordinary and the everyday under focus. The screen thus can be seen to distort visions of reality as well as perceptions of that reality. Yet these and other distortions within the ocular have always existed within such discourses. What polarizes the screen in contemporary discourse is that it is no longer exclusively associated with a passive model of viewing. There is no dilemma in the screen (i.e. computer and digitalized) now being interactive. The problem arises in the crossover between the interactive screen and a passive model of viewing, (as the acquiescent vision of the world is not lost). It is here that the anxiety of contemporary vision lies. The screen still removes us from the principle reality of the actual as it has always done, but now that reality can also be manipulated and altered beyond the distortions of the apparatus without trace or evidence.

The digital age, however, still cannot be considered a complete rupture from traditional illusionistic conventions.[40] It draws from many arcane technologies as its source and it does not support a new representational system.[41] Photography and video are still pivotal within the construction and simulation of other technological environments. Even the artificial scenarios of virtual reality, which can be constructed without any reference to the external world, still rely on the basic principles of monocular perspective to simulate reality-like *mis-en-scène.* The

[39] *ibid.*
[40] As innovation and invention is continuous and on going, it is not possible to establish specific moments or points of isolated, independent shifts.
[41] To further extrapolate upon this point, it could be said that the screen in the contemporary era takes on many of the characteristics and traits of Postmodernism. That is it participates in a methodology of multiplicity, pluralism, referencing and eclecticism. See Gablik, Suzi. *Has Modernism Failed?* New York, Thames and Hudson, 1984 for further discussion on strategies and characteristics of Postmodernism.

representational system of the screen is the dominant paradigm within digital culture. This is where the screen comes into its own. It is here that it functions concurrently as a rational methodology for pictorial construction *and* as a technological artefact. Nevertheless, as previously defined in the representational practices of the Renaissance, these practices have always been complexly intertwined.

Chapter Two:

Painting and the Technological Screen

The flat/deep space of the screen

The space of the technological screen is neither real nor illusionistic. It is an in-between space that relies solely on informational input.[42] It can be changed in an instant and without trace. Painting on the other hand always leaves some trace and relies on the information of substance - the materialism of paint. The technological screen is everything that painting is not. Painting is not an illuminated object like the technological screen. The screen is "a surface without depth - and continuous by definition"[43] that is grounded in temporal formlessness. Thus the technological screen *image* is also continuous, seamless and homogenized. For painting to participate in temporality it too must become accumulative, and assiduous. This could be developed within a multitude of strategies.[44]

Within these definitions lies the spatiality of the technological screen surface - it is at once flat and at the same time deep or recessional. Pictorial space oscillates between the two poles of flatness and illusion, but is not bound by either definition. In a general observation of contemporary painting practices this concept is constructed by the fabrication of an homogenized ground with figurative elements located on top of it. These elements do not always sit happily on, or within, the same plane. Often they are rendered in a variety of positions, using a variety of pictorial devices such as exaggerated viewpoint coupled with silhouettes or meandering lines with perspectival elements. Pictorial space

[42] Reylea, Lane. "Virtually Formal", *Artforum*, Vol. 37, No.1, Sept 1998, p.174.
[43] Gilbert-Rolfe, Jeremy. "Cabbages, Raspberries, and Video's Thin Brightness", *Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, Italy, Academy Group, 1996, p.15.
[44] One example of this is seen in Modernism. Painting articulated time as a de-construction of parts - i.e. Futurism - by breaking time into individual, discreet units spatiality gave the suggestion of formlessness and temporality. Thus completeness and continuity can be coded within segmentation and unitization. The Modernist grid also exemplifies this point.

becomes a montage of paradigms that fuse to re-contextualize mediated spatiality. By 'shaking up' traditional pictorial conventions these elements unsettle spatial illusion and dislocate the contemporary painterly picture plane.

This description of spatial articulation has become associated with the use of technology. In digital culture, screen-based interfaces use a variety of spatial models. Images are captured directly from an external reality, through screen-based technologies such as cameras,[45] which in turn produces an illusion of real space. At this point, images can be altered through traditional (but virtual) means such as by cutting and pasting, drawing or painting over the top.[46] Different spatial paradigms are used to render the one image, which is then perceived as an homogenized unit. In this instance real and virtual space inform each other. Unlike more traditional collage techniques the tactility and substance of the technique is located within the interface. This too is a virtual articulation.

The screen of the technological apparatus describes this flat/deep space. When the screen of a computer or television is turned on, the surface becomes active. In an active state it emanates light and this is perceived as an illusion of recessional space.[47] However, the surface or the physicality of the screen is not active, it is static. The material of the screen surface always remains passive, yet this passive surface is able to reflect eternal images.[48] It is here that the incongruency between what lies in and on the screen is established. It is here that the perpetual sense of 'betweenness' originates.

[45] This includes all types of cameras; photographic, video, movie, digital etc.
[46] David Hockney describes this in *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* as a re-affirmation of the artist's mark back into images. He declares that the camera removed the mark of the artist from the surface of the image but with technology such as PhotoShop and other computer imaging programs the artist's mark has been re-interpreted and re-instated. These programs also use tools that are derived from traditional practices such as paintbrushes, scissors or pens etc.
[47] When an interface image is illuminated from behind and not from in front (as in viewing objects and images in reality) the pictorial space of that image is perceived as being indeterminate in location. Other examples include illuminated photographs on light boxes.
[48] This reflection may or may not be a deliberate action.

The works of the following four, seemingly disparate artists, indicate two ways in which visual technologies have altered contemporary spatial conventions. First, it appears as an illusion of recessional space, which is corrupted by pictorial elements located on the painterly surface to produce a flat, formal spatiality. Secondly, the screen becomes a literal boundary between the illusionistic space of the image and the actual space of the picture plane.

The work of Fabian Marcaccio is not of or about technology but is concerned with the history of painting and the actuality of paint. Yet in his engagement with paint he intrinsically recalls the surface and space of the technological screen. In the work *Paint-Zone L.A. #5*, 1995 (Fig. 8), Marcaccio suggests that the space of the painted image imitates the space of the television or video screen. Here Marcaccio follows similar conventions with the image or action-taking place just below the face of the screen or just behind the passive structure of the surface. Instead of using a transparent glass, Marcaccio utilizes painterly tropes to achieve a comparative articulation. Areas of rendered canvas invite the viewer beyond the plane of inter-weaving shapes[49] and into the structure itself. A circuitous line or large expressive brushstroke slices the picture plane.

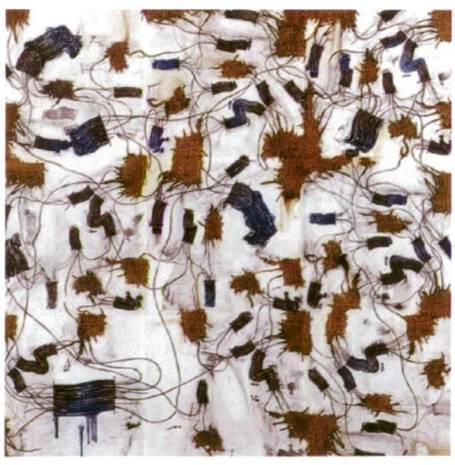

Fig. 8. Fabian Marcaccio, *Paint-Zone L.A. #5*, 1995.

Fig. 9. Fabian Marcaccio, *Paint-Zone L.A. #1*, 1995.

[49] Marcaccio uses the materials of painting to form the surface structure of his work. Such materials include thick impasto paint, raw canvas or wooden canvas supports.

This mark or form becomes the boundary or inscription that separates one plane from the next. In other works (*Paint-Zone L.A. #1*, 1995 (Fig. 9), and *Brushwork Paintant*, 1999 (Fig. 10), Marcaccio uses scanned images of the painted surfaces or canvas weave and combines these with collages of political symbols, advertising logos and other emblematic motifs. In these works the manipulated digital surface becomes the screen of the computer as well as the metaphorical screen of illusion. The rift between the illusion of the painting surface and the surface itself proposes an alternative spatial relationship. It refuses to be de-fined coherently as it enters a dynamic plane outside that of conventional spatiality. His work is physical as well as virtual. It is painting as image and painting as object. It is social comment and political statement. Within these anomalies Marcaccio succeeds in agitating the boundaries of traditional pictorial notation and figure/ground relationships.

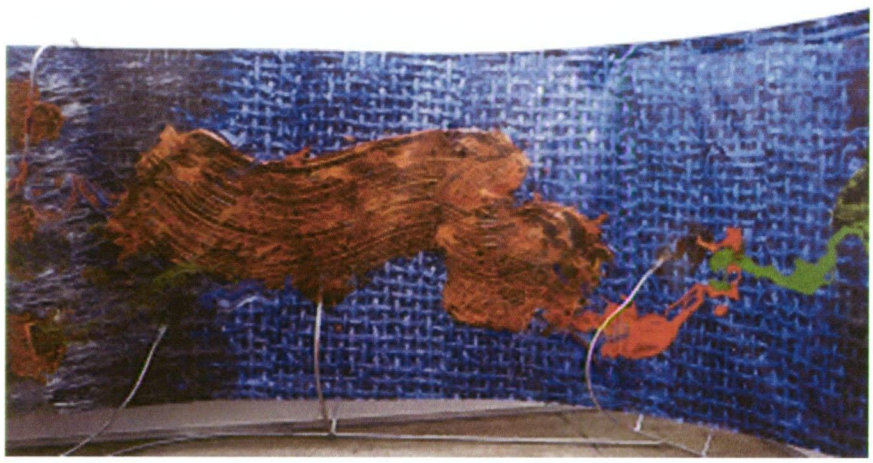

Fig. 10. Fabian Marcaccio, *Brushwork Paintant*, 1999.

Like Marcaccio, Inka Essenhigh conjures work that has a connection with the technological screen. Her screen however, is largely dependent on the reference to computer animation and the surreal world of virtual reality-type games. The ground of her paintings is flat and empty but in this emptiness there is an uncanny formality. The handling of paint is also seemingly flat but on closer inspection it is painstakingly layered. This produces a

dense hard surface on which all the other elements are hinged.[50] The density is under-cut by the fields of even colour and exaggerated perspectival illusion. The entire image appears to be shallow and compressed close to the pictorial surface of the frame yet there is also a sense of vastness in her spatial sensibility. This compact spatial rendering juxtaposed with a crisp fluid line, or exaggerated perspective, flips back and forward in location. This movement in, and out, of the pictorial space is heightened by the sense of an expanding landscape or setting.

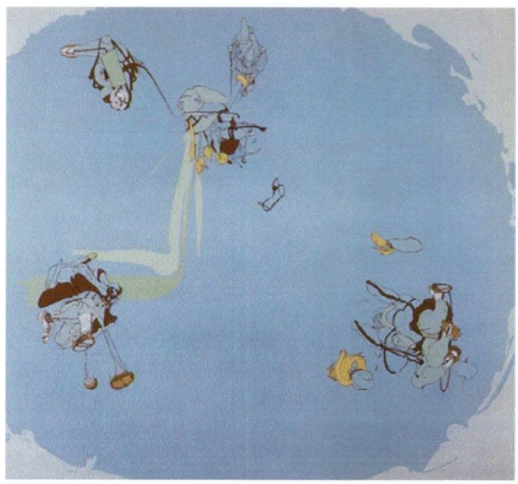

Fig. 11. Inka Essenhigh, *Cheerleaders and Sky*, 1999.

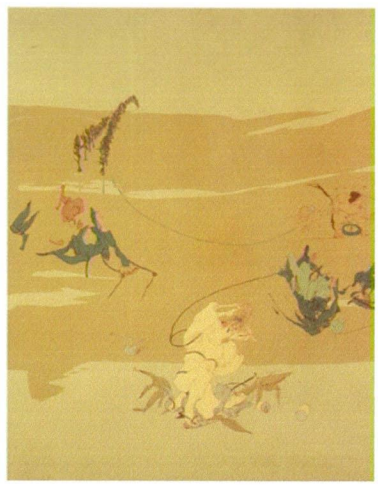

Fig. 12. Inka Essenhigh, *Goody*, 1999.

In images such as *Cheerleaders and Sky*, 1999 (Fig. 11), and *Goody*, 1999 (Fig. 12), the figures are rendered as strange cartoon-like aberrations in an expressionless landscape. Whether sky or land, this landscape is generic and ambiguous, while her figures recall sci-fi monsters or generically engineered mutations. The barren demographic and vacuous emotive context locates these images into a space that appears between hallucination, virtuality, animation and reality. By the employment of different spatial paradigms, flat formality, diminished scaled cartoon figuration within empty landscapes, and a perplexing rhythm or movement within the pictorial plane she not only recalls the flat/deep space of

[50] This characteristic is also evident in Marcaccio's work. Essenhigh uses a fluid calligraphic line to render detail and figure while Marcaccio uses the materiality of paint and painting materials to corrupt the surface.

the screen but also critiques the possibilities of further technological advancement.

The screen as a literal painterly boundary

The second way that the technological screen manifests itself within contemporary painting is through the construction of a literal boundary. This boundary is essentially derived from the passive construct of the screen surface - i.e. the materiality of the screen surface - that confines the illuminated image to the interface. This barrier in painterly construction is established through a variety of techniques, however, here it is the materiality of paint that causes the separation. Two examples of this are illustrated through the work of Chuck Close and Richard Patterson. Chuck Close literally documents the physical presence

Fig. 13. Chuck Close, *Frank*, 1969.

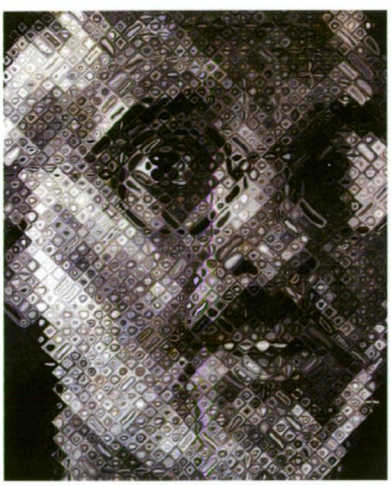

Fig. 14. Chuck Close, *Mark*, 1997.

of technology through the abstracted pixelated surface of his large-scale portraits. The pixelated surface of paint becomes the screen from which the image of a figure is partly concealed. Like the computer, which converts all information (visual or otherwise) into data, Close neutralizes both paint and his subject through the

negation of this process. In the early (Fig. 13)[51] and late images (Fig. 14), Close reduces the pictorial plane to a calculated grid, which becomes the literal physical boundary. By reducing the surface to a detached geometrical structure, Close uses the grid to heighten the expectation of something lying beyond or behind. This recalls the Modernist discourse of the grid in correlation with "other" interpretations pertaining to spirituality and the sacred.

Rosalind Krauss' essay "Grids" describes the modernist grid as having two functions. "One is spatial; the other is temporal." [52] The spatial dimension organizes, flattens and homogenizes the surface while, in the temporal dimension, the grid becomes a symbol for its time. She goes on to say that through the grid the artist is able to create a "rift" between the "sacred and secular"[53] or the reality of the external world and an internal 'other'. This too is also implicit in the use of the grid in this current visual regime but the grid now also alludes to technological reduction. This reduction establishes an unease or tension that is concurrently derived through the passive boundary of the technological screen and the concealing or camouflaging presentation of such images in addition to Krauss' "sacred and secular" differentiation.

As the influence of computer technology and the digitalized screen is plainly explicit in Close's images, so too is the screen of the photographic image implicit in the works of Richard Patterson. Close, on one hand, uses photography to give his models a permanence and stability. It is within the 'quick' capture of the photographic image and the time of painting the representation that a subjective lag is produced.[54] The objectivity of the camera here enables Close to escape this subjectivity as, " photography seems to track and trace its external referent without pointing back,

[51] Close uses the grid here in the early images to scale up the original photograph.
[52] Krauss, Rosalind, E. "Grids" *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths,* Cambridge, (Mass), MIT Press, 1991, p. 9.
[53] *ibid.*, p. 12.
[54] See section *The disembodiment of screen vision,* in this chapter for further explanation.

indexically, to the personality of the operator." [55] In removing or limiting his own subjectivity Close is employing the screen as a camouflage or filter. However, the screen of the photographic image also implies an abstract relationship with the painted image.[56] It is here that the illusionistic veil of the *motion blur*, diffusion and rings of confusion cloud the vision. The painted image, in this instance, employs photography not as a tool for verisimilitude but as a means to subvert that representation. Like Richter's blurry landscape paintings, Richard Patterson engages the photograph in order to conceal the detail of the image and re-present that image as an homogenized surface of painted substance. But unlike the photograph, the surface of the painting can never be completely homogenous because there is no such thing as a blurred painting - only a blurred image that is painted.[57] Patterson's *Untitled 1999* (Fig. 15), series depicts plastic toy soldiers dipped in marbled paint. The paint is both viscous and solid; it hugs the figures closely and dissolves the surface of the toys into one of malleable, oozing tactility. Parts of these toys then emerge from deep within the marbled paint, at first only barely recognizable and then defiantly so.

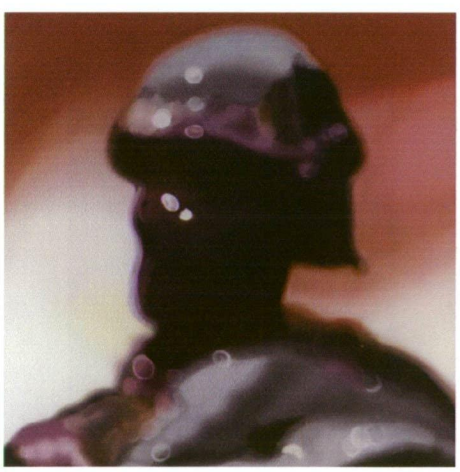

Fig. 15. Richard Patterson, *Untitled (head)*, 1999.

Fig. 16. Richard Patterson, *Can you feel me*, 1999.

[55] Smith, Terry. *op.cit.*, p.129.
[56] Gilbert-Rolfe, Jeremey. *op.cit.* The photograph has always followed two distinct paths of representation, the first is towards an exact replication of reality as seen in the work of Chuck Close and the other towards an atmospheric subversive articulation as seen in Uta Barth for example.
[57] *ibid.*

Through the use of the photographic image these toy soldiers exist in an illusionistic pictorial uncertainty "...where sexuality, violence, innocence, heroism and malice coexist."[58] The uncertainty is driven however not by the photographic screen but through the re-interpretation of this screen onto the painted surface. The image itself is forced back into the space of the picture plane through the mediated blurring but the paint substance reverses this ambition. The images thus become a terse articulation of oscillating spatiality. This procedure takes on another dimension in such works as *Can you feel me,* 1999 (Fig. 16). Here the top area of the rifle not only escapes the vitreous screen of blurring but also the plane of the pictorial surface. It has entered the space of the viewer and threatens to melt down the frame of the picture and stain the pristine gallery walls. At this moment the painting surface takes on the same significance as the painted metaphorical screen, it acts as a barrier, which draws attention to the threat of the image violating the space of the world.

A new flatness

One characteristic that all these works have in common is an increasing sense of spatial flattening or spatial compression. To return to the question posed at the outset - how has the depiction of flatness shifted under the scrutiny of the screen? - it seems that even the boundaries of this once rigid entity are now in flux. As seen through the descriptions of the above artists' work, flatness no longer simply refers to flat planes and colour. In a general discussion of contemporary pictorial space, terminology such as 'fragmented', 'multi-dimensional', 'hybridized' and 'heterogeneity' seem to be more appropriate than the formalist terms of 'flat' or 'illusionistic'. Flatness, too, has become an illusion; it is both shallow and deep as in Marcaccio's scanned grounds of canvas weave; or Inka Essenhigh's laborious layered surfaces; or it has an overall appearance of reduction as witnessed

[58] Cohan, James from the exhibition catalogue *Richard Patterson, New Paintings,* New York, James Cohan Gallery, 1999, p.5.

within Close's gridded surfaces. A re-definition of 'flatness' within this context seems appropriate.

At the outset of the twentieth century there was a move to re-establish flat pictorial space - as artists "...had discovered the expressive power inherent in maintaining the visual presence of the picture plane."[59] This idea reached its zenith in Modernism as artists sort to achieve a homogenized unity in an overall spatial harmony.[60] It was the actuality of the flat painting surface that became the dominant aesthetic paradigm and the objective was to create a "...monolithic universality of space and form."[61] This general move towards flatness was seen as an association with 'interiority' and 'self-definition'. It was through Greenberg's analysis [62] that flatness was defined as about 'doing and being'– about process and an internalized vision. The immediacy or tension of the surface was not so much a negation of representation but a determination of the representation of that space.[63] Furthermore it was on the surface that the space of representation and the space of flatness became occupied by abstraction. In Greenbergian logic, flatness (lack of depth) was thus coded as a signifier to ontological concerns through the 'purity' of abstraction.

In a Postmodern discourse, the dominant aesthetic concerns are considered to be pluralistic rather than monolithic. Multiplicity and the eclectic are valid models of objectivity. Suzi Gablik in *Has Modernism Failed?* states that the pluralist attitude of Postmodernist thinking rejects moral value, and aesthetic judgement as "[e]verything now can be accommodated" [64] which

[59] Dunning, William, V. *Changing Images of Pictorial Space; A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting*, New York, Syracuse University Press, p.133.
[60] This evidence in seen in wide diversity within Modernism with such examples as Mondrian's grids, Newman's zips, Pollack's splatter paintings and Klein's monochromes to name a few.
[61] *ibid.*, p.216.
[62] See *Clement Greenberg; The Collected Essays and Criticism*, (ed.) John O'Brian, University of Chicago Press, 1988-93 for an in-depth investigation on flatness within abstraction with particular reference to Volume 3; Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956, p.102 for a description on the compression of deep illusionistic space to a surface articulation.
[63] Benjamin, Andrew. *What is Abstraction?* London, Academy Group, 1996, p.16.
[64] Gablik, *op.cit.*, p.75.

collapses "the overall pattern of meaning".[65] It is within these parameters that Fredric Jameson acknowledges flatness to a literal definition of contemporary sensibilities and located within the constructs of 'the superficial'.[66] Gablik also reiterates this idea in the statements "[t]he only truth Pluralism allows is that it is absolutely true there is no such thing as absolute truth" as "[a]rbitariness is the pitfall of unlimited freedom."[67] So that the lack of spatial illusion becomes an expression of artificial values instead of individualism and self-determination.

In the essay " Notes on Surface, towards a genealogy of flatness",[68] David Joselit examines both these definitions and concludes that within the present visual climate both definitions are true and both have made resounding contributions to contemporary practice. A sense of 'interiority' or internalized vision is still explicit through a move towards a shallower pictorial articulation or a diminishing illusion of spatiality. Although 'interiority' is no longer synonymous with 'self-definition', but coded currently within the negation of representation. It is here that a model of pastiche or the artificial is instigated. Thus the shift from 'interiority' dependant on 'self-definition' to one dependant on 'the superficial' suggests a definition of what can also be tendered as 'otherness'. Richard Patterson's paint-dipped figurines behind a screen of photography's blurred vision are an evaluation of 'interiority' (as seen through his allusion to other propositions such as violence, heroism etc) and are also dependent upon the superficial. In Patterson's case the skilful painterly barrier that occludes the toy solider from view depicts the superficial. It is Patterson's painterly accomplishment that masks a 'shallow' engagement with the context.

Much of this can be seen to be true of the other artists discussed in this paper. Greenberg's acknowledgment of 'doing and being' is also prevalent within the location of flatness but flatness of 'doing'

[65] *ibid.*, p.76.
[66] Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, p.9.
[67] Gablik, *op.cit.*, p.77.
[68] Joselit, David. "Notes on Surface, towards a genealogy of flatness", *Association of Art Historians*, Vol. 23, No. 1, March 2000.

through the immediate surface now becomes a means to an end, a presentation of production rather than the presentation itself. This is clearly explicit in Fabian Marcaccio's simulation of brushstrokes and canvas weave. Here the gesture is not gestural and expression is not expressionistic[69] but a terse manipulation of these once economic formulations for the exploration of painterly narration. This is also true of Chuck Close's evolution from a reliance on photography's verisimilitude to the abstracted depiction of pixelated surfaces. In moving away from a realistic illusion of pictorial space in his early portraits, to a literal boundary of gridded surface colour, Close is moving away from representation as the screen of 'being' to a process that is concurrent with production. Again the surface is charged with simulated marks but in this instance, instead of banishing 'interiority', he is clearly employing it.

In this estimation, flatness as decreed by the screen as a representational methodology, is as partial to the proclamations of Modernism as it is to Postmodernism. By effectively having one foot in each camp it can be safely surmised that it is neither new nor a breakaway from traditional modes of inquiry. In saying this, it does solicit an uneasy placement. This ambiguity or imputation is a direct consequence of its polarized standing in two distinctly opposing ideas of thought. It could be concluded that this ambiguity is also indicative of a contemporary sensibility as it is well acknowledged that painting has always functioned as a cultural signifier.[70] Thus painting within this regime occupies the state between two ideals and locates its proposition as a temporal interpretation of both.

[69] Benjamin, Andrew, *op.cit.*, p.43.
[70] As described in the practices of the previously discussed artists.

Chapter Three:

Painting and the Metaphorical Screen

Interiority and the Screen

The Greenbergian concept of "interiority" is still a prevalent feature within contemporary painting. Yet "interiority" within this context is also considered a screen - a metaphorical interpretation that describes the difference between the external world of reality and the internal world of the imagination. In this instance the painting picture plane becomes the screen; a boundary which demarcates the external world which exists outside the plane of the image and the internal world represented by the illusion rendered within. As illustrated within the work of Caravaggio, this boundary is one that has always been particular to painting and is a consequence of both illusion and representation. Even in the supposed myth of the birth of painting,[71] the drawing of a silhouette portrait becomes the separation or screen for the entrance into the world beyond the real and into the realm of the imagined.

Lisa Yuskavage is one such artist who sits on the cusp of this imaginary world. Her inflatable doll-like women with their grotesquely malformed breasts and cutesy wide-eyed expressions perch dangerously on this ledge. Somewhere between Yuskavage's figurative abstraction and reductive representation lies an implicit sense of 'other'. Within the figuration the viewer is reminded of the external and ordinary world but by simply reducing this, with distortions and uninhabited spaces, she removes the sense of ease that is found in the recognition of the everyday. She does not, however, relocate the viewer onto safer ground. She allows them to be swallowed up by their own libidinous desires and endangered by their own appetite for seduction. This too, is all a big tease

[71] The myth of painting has been attributed to Pliny the Elder. In the myth, the potter Butades draws a silhouette of his daughter's lover before he goes off to battle. When she has lost the memory of his appearance she re-enter the interiority of her imagination prompted by the simple outline. *See Pliny's Natural History*, H. Rackman, (trans), Cambridge, London, Loeb Classical Library, 1952 for a detailed account of this mythology.

because behind the screen is only more plastic enticement that continues to circle in an endless pattern of ambiguity.

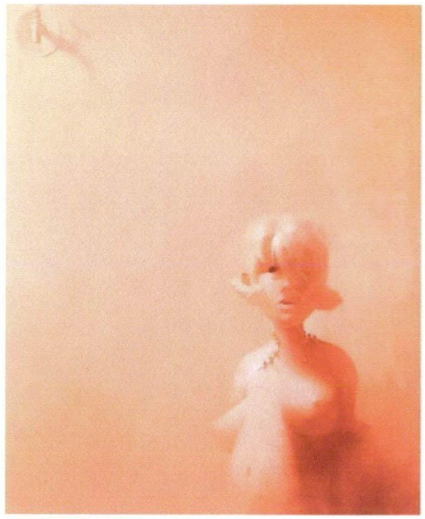

Fig. 17. Lisa Yuskavage, *Faucet, 1995.*

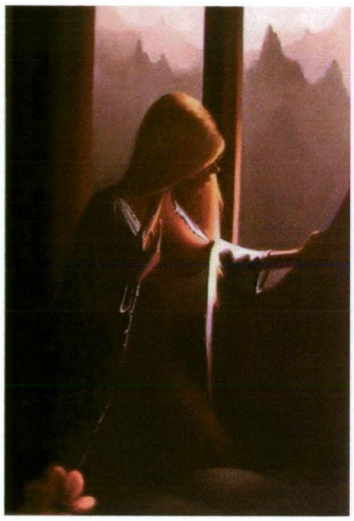

Fig. 18. Lisa Yuskavage, *Honeymoon,* 1998.

In the work *Faucet,* 1995 (Fig. 17), a blonde pixie stares vacantly out into the space of the external world, her mouth is open in a semi-sexual pout, as if to beckon the viewer to step past the plane. She seems to be introspectively waiting for a response. She stands in an undisclosed location, in an empty spatial void that is both poignant and pensive. The only other detail in the image is a tap in the left-hand corner, its shadow appearing within the void as a flaccid phallus. Both figure and ground share the same compressed pictorial space and everything (except the breasts) is subdued by an engulfing tactile spatiality. In this and other images, *Honeymoon*, 1998 (Fig. 18), the figure is depicted close to the surface of the picture plane, nudity and vulnerability drawing the viewer over the edge of the painting screen into the world of imagination. Once inside this realm, the unlocatable space and sickly sweet cuteness, dissolves away into a surreal, almost hallucinogenic comfort. The comfort, however, is empty and artificial (like too much silicon in plastic surgery), and the sense of falseness too strong to register more than a cursory erotic engagement. The figures themselves are also responsible for this

anxious tryst, as they too become "empty screens, blank canvases, mere sites upon which to project sexual fantasy."[72]

The images of Louise Hearman also exist in this ambiguous world of imagination and uncertainty. Her figures and creatures seem to sit just outside of the ordinary and they haunt the periphery of this illusionary realm. Like Caravaggio, she too, entices the viewer through the tactile seduction of luscious paint, but by revealing the brown surface of the masonite painting support she just as quickly dispels the illusion (Fig. 19 & 20). The sense of something beyond disappears in the same instance as the recognition of the ground. The screen of illusion recedes away in the dissolving paint layers. Once again the viewers find themselves outside the plane of the surface screen and in the external world.

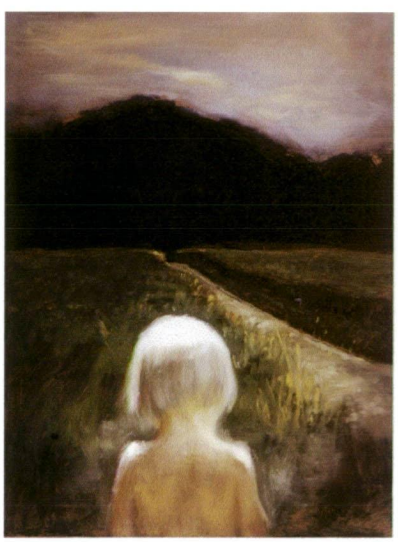

Fig. 19. Louise Hearman, *Untitled,* 1995.

Fig. 20. Louise Hearman, *Untitled,* 1995.

The sudden jolt that occurs when the illusion of paint and surface has been shattered is one that is subtly handled. The intimate scale of the images allows the viewer to take the whole scene in quickly and completely. At first the seduction is accommodated by the dramatic lighting and rich paint layers, but as soon as this is experienced the desire is to take another step closer, to be nearer

[72] Brooks, Rosetta. "Lisa Yuskavage, Some Girls Do", *Art and Text*, No. 54, 1996, p.32.

"...to the palpable edge just beyond the real".[73] It is here that the tension builds just outside the surface, however, even when the illusion is lost, the impulse remains, the desire to return to the moment when the suspension was real. Again the viewer is antagonized with an alarming sense of both engagement and disengagement - of want and desire coupled with distraction and repulsion.

The ambivalent contemporary experience.

One final observation can be made from an examination of the artists discussed thus far - i.e. a sense of ambivalence or unease within contemporary experience. Each artist not only uses the screen as a representational methodology but also effectively employs it to reference contemporary experience. This is apparent, as a comment on technology and the individual, through Chuck Close's massive pixelated portraits or Inka Essenhigh's mutated cartoon creatures that reflect current anxieties within the subject of human cloning and genetic engineered crops. Lisa Yuskavage's silicon implanted, peroxided doll-like women articulate the apprehension of appearance and beauty within popular culture, while Richard Patterson explores violence, heroism and artifice as alternative concepts. Fabian Marcaccio also uses artifice to construct a picture of the contemporary but he uses the vehicle of painting through technology to unsettle the boundaries of reality, illusion and the internal. His use of the sign could be interpreted as an allusion to the eternal world of reality through the guise of advertising and media. This allusion to the 'other' is both a commentary on the place of the multi-national company within technology and within the artistic community. Within his work, representation and illusion combine to construct a picture of contemporary society that is fraught with tensions and insecurities. The viewer is either antagonized or made to feel vulnerable in the light of technology, politics or social conditioning. Even Louise Hearman pushes at the edge of this void by malevolently seducing the viewer into a realm of fantasy, just stopping short of

[73] Kidd, Courtney. "Louise Hearman", in Laura Murray Cree, & Nevill Drury, *Australian Painting Now*, Sydney, Craftsman House, 2000, p.140.

completing the illusion. We are thus left standing on the border between one world and the next, not confident enough to take the next step beyond in either direction and left in a perpetual cycle of apprehension and trepidation.

PART TWO: CONTEXT

Every era has to reinvent the project of "spirituality" for itself. (Spirituality = plans, terminologies, ideas of deportment aimed at re-resolving the painful structural contradictions inherent in the human situation, at the completion of human consciousness, at transcendence).[74]

Susan Sontag

The central impetus of this research project is an investigation of contemporary painterly pictorial space, however, the underlying context of the project is an inquiry into the nature of contemporary experience. As developed in the central argument the proposal maintains that an anxiety or paradoxical trepidation was established by the engagement of two-dimensional images through the guise of the screen. This engagement has constructed an ambivalent pictorial spatiality that could be also described as transitional or a state 'between'. In this context, 'between' is interpretated as a positive and negative affirmation. It signifies an undisclosed temporal location that throughout critical discourse has pertained to ideals concerning 'emptiness', 'the unknown', 'interiority', 'the void', 'otherness' and so on. Here, this relationship has been defined through the "absolute limit" of the experience of "Nothing". The "absolute limit"[75] is established in this project as a boundary or extreme in contemporary experience and has been determined as objects/figurines alluding to a highly charged social and/or cultural association.

Chapter Four outlines how "Nothing" is the emptying out, or banishment, of something and how this concept is located in the space 'between'. The writings of Henri Bersgon and Martin Heidegger define the central philosophical discourse, followed by illustrating examples on how a number of artists confront this incongruous entity within a visual medium. Chapter Five considers

[74] Sontag, Susan. "The Aesthetics of Silence", *A Susan Sontag Reader*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982, p. 181. It was this quote that first determined an alternative "reading" of spirituality and 'otherness' as a concept. It also assisted in determining the most pertinent investigation for this question. I had always been weary of the term "spirituality" because of its obvious loaded associations, but acknowledged that it had always formed an integral part of my practice.

[75] See quote by Gerhard Richter on p. 41 of this chapter.

artistic practices that have had a direct influence upon the conceptual and formal elements of my own practice. This chapter is divided into two areas; related art practices of artists in a historical context and related art practices of artists within a contemporary context. The historical context describes the work of two diverse artists, whose work has been instrumental in determining the early objectives and themes of the project. The work of these artists may not resemble mine, nor even deal with similar conceptual ideas but in some way or in some characteristic, they have assisted the formulation of my primary concerns. It goes without saying that this list is not conclusive and other artists such as Andy Warhol or Gerhard Richter have been equally consequential. They have managed to find their way into other sections of the paper to illustrate particular ideas as they occur.

Chapter Six discusses other relevant experiences and ideas that have also been pivotal in developing this work. These were the result of an artist's residency in Beijing during 2000. The central investigation in this chapter discusses the role of the military in the everyday and propaganda imagery.

Chapter Four:

The Something of "Nothing"

Nothing More than Something

Nothing is the most potent thing in the world. [76]

Robert Barry

... it is of the upmost importance not to make a thing but rather to make nothing [77]

John Cage

It makes no sense to expect or claim to 'make the invisible visible'. Or the unknown known, or the unthinkable thinkable.

[76] Sourced from Rugoff, Ralph. "On Invisibility in Art" *Nothing*, Graham Gussin, and Ele Carpenter, (ed.), August Media and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, 2001, p. 102.
[77] Cage, John. "Lecture on Something", *Silence: Lectures and writings of John Cage*, Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p.129.

We can draw conclusions about the invisible; we can postulate its existence with relative certainty. But all we can represent is an analogy, which stands for the invisible but is not it at all.[78]

It is not possible to visualise Nothing. One way to gain some idea of that terrible state is through the impossibility of visualising anything before, after or alongside the universe. Now since we very much want this visualisation, but know it only as one that we can never have, it is in an impossibility that we experience, existentially, as an absolute limit.[79]

Gerhard Richter

In the above quote Gerhard Richter describes this idea of "Nothing" as a state; that is, as some site or space that locates itself outside the known world (i.e. the universe). He goes on to add that to locate this idea within the sphere of the known it must be felt in the context of extremes. These extremes can in one sense be comprehended as poles of thought.

The representation of images within this project (the loaded association of the objects - toy soldiers) only exists as a mask. This mask is a camouflage for a discussion of "Nothing". As John Cage infamously said " I have nothing to say ...and I am saying It..."[80] and "Nothing has been said. Nothing has been communicated",[81] "Nothing" becomes the commentary of contemporary experience. "Nothing" is a contradictory and paradoxical statement and this paradox asserts other insecurities such as indifference, ambiguity and ambivalence. The true context of this project then, is the sense of ambiguity and unease that is asserted by "Nothing".

As Pierre Bismuth declares in the catalogue for the exhibition *Nothing*, "Nothing" can also be associated with or defined as "absence", "silence", "emptiness", "vacuity", "the negligible", "the absurd", "the invisible", "the unknown", "the unseen"[82]. Some of these terms relate to spatial characteristics such as the phrases "emptiness", and "vacuity" while others allude to

[78] Richter, Gerhard. David Britt, (trans), *The Daily Practice of Painting*, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, (ed.), London, Anthony d'offay Gallery and Thames & Hudson, 1995, p. 11.
[79] *ibid.*, p.123.
[80] Cage, John. *op.cit.*, p.109.
[81] *ibid.*, p.136.
[82] Bismuth, Pierre. "Never believe an artist who says their work is about nothing: the cultures consumer's fear of the void" in *Nothing*, p.180.

psychological states "the unknown" and "the absurd". Within a definition of "Nothing" no differentiation between the two descriptions can be made. Hence "Nothing" is a psychological, spatial limit which exists in an endless cycle of contradiction and impossibility.

Artists, too, have other titles or generalizations that essentially pertain to the same context. Yves Klein named it the "Void" and presented it to the world through the context of an empty room alongside the "Zone of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility". Andy Warhol made "invisible sculpture"; John Cage wrote a piece of music about it calling it "4'33"; Malevich wrote a manifesto detailing the representational depiction of it; and Robert Ryman believes it existed within monochromatic white; whilst Gerhard Richter believes it exists in the colour grey. It can be found in the sculptures of Anish Kapoor; and Helio Oiticica found it in the material and psychological space of architecture. The list goes on. The quest for the articulation of such ideas however is not an easy one, and there are no definitive titles, images or strategies that actualize these intentions. It is a quest that is paradoxically impossible; a quest that follows a convoluted path from knowing to the unknown; from absence to presence; and from something to nothing.

Nothing is wrong

In saying this then, how does one visualise "Nothing"? In *Creative Evolution,* Henri Bergson explains that to represent "Nothing", we first must try and imagine it. To imagine "Nothing" we must eliminate all perceptions, all sensation and all consciousness. But in the elimination of consciousness (external perception) an involuntary unconscious (internal perception) is evoked, so by eliminating the unconscious the conscious returns. It is thus only possible to exclude one perception at any given moment. Hence "the effort by which we strive to create this image simply ends in making us swing to and fro between visions of an

outer and inner reality."[83] In the movement between with *and* without - the inner *and* the outer - there is a point that the perception of the 'other' is not established and it is here that the image of "Nothing" lies. "Nothing" is both with *and* without, internal *and* external, concurrently object *and* subject as well as the endless transition from one *to* the other. This image is therefore always "full of things"[84] and proposes itself as a positive constituent that is experienced through the exchange of desire and expectation.

Heidegger too, suggested that the idea of "Nothing" is also a positive quantifier, when he infamously said " The Nothing itself noths." In this incongruous statement Heidegger transforms the indefinable pronoun into a noun and thus names the "Nothing" into something. He goes on to confirm its actuality by saying the "existence of this entity would be denied in its very definition".[85] Hence the physicality of "Nothing" is no more than something. Or more clearly described when someone exclaims that 'nothing is wrong' indicating that "Nothing" is a substitute for something.

This something can then be summarized as that which is not explained or that which is just beyond reach. That is, something that our senses cannot perceive. "Nothing", indeed, can be much more; it can be everything that we fail to understand - everything that we fail to apprehend. It is the limitation of our physicality and technologies that bound such ideas,[86] for it is the imperceptible that often catches the imagination. In describing "Nothing" as just short of something, there is an eternal optimism within its limitations. "Nothing" can consequently be described as the

[83] Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution,* London, Macmillan & Co., 1913, p.295.
[84] *ibid.*
[85] Murray, Michael. (ed.), *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy,* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1978, p. 25.
[86] Ferguson, Kitty. "Prison of Light-Black Holes", Cambridge University Press, 1998 sourced from Francis McKee, "From Zero to Nothing in No Time", *Nothing*, p. 24. In this example "Nothing" can be described as anything that we cannot see for instance, before the discovery of other galaxies it was stated that there was nothing else in the universe. Thus technology and the limitation of both intellect and the body formed the boundary of knowledge.

possibility of the other, a flirtation with the immaterial, and the potentiality of the unknown.[87]

This is not to say that the continual shifting or perpetual oscillation between perceptions of inner and outer, with and without, is not lacking tension. The temporality of the moment and the ephemerality of this image are fraught with anxiety. This anxiety is a result of dislocation, disbelief and hesitation. Philosopher Gregory Bateson terms this as "continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose developments avoids any orientation towards a culminating point or external end". [88]

Bergson describes the representation of "Nothing" as an idea and not an image. So that to imagine "Nothing" it first must be conceived through some other illustration. He uses Descartes' example of the thousand-sided polygon to demonstrate that such ideas may not be clearly defined as images within the imagination but the possibility of its construction may still be perceivable. Within the pictorial arts the representation of "Nothing" follows a similar argument. In Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog,* 1818 (Fig. 21), a lone figure with his back to the viewer looks out on the edge of a vast and undefined vista. Barnett Newman constructs a monochromatic immensity in the all black canvas *Abraham,* 1949 and Robert Rauschenberg uses an array of eclectic collages for the work *Mother of God,* 1950 (Fig. 22), or in the act of erasing a de Kooning drawing (1953). These examples illustrate the myriad ways in which such concepts can be articulated in the visual sense. In each instance the artist has insisted on some other vehicle or description through which such an investigation can be carried out. Friedrich's strategy is to use man against nature as a context that conjures an emotive reading through the Sublime. Newman uses the purity of paint and the guise of minimal abstraction as a medium to bear witness to the

[87] Gerhard Richter quoted in a text for a catalogue of *documenta 7,* Kassel, 1982 sourced from *Richter, Gerhard,* p.100. Richter describes the context of his abstract work (and this is also inferred to in his other collective work) in the same terms. My paintings "make visual a reality that we can neither see nor describe, but whose existence we can postulate. We denote this reality in negative terms: the unknown, the incomprehensible, the infinite." "... the unknown simultaneously alarms us and fills us with hope, and so we accept pictures in a possible way to make the inexplicable more explicable, or at all events more accessible."

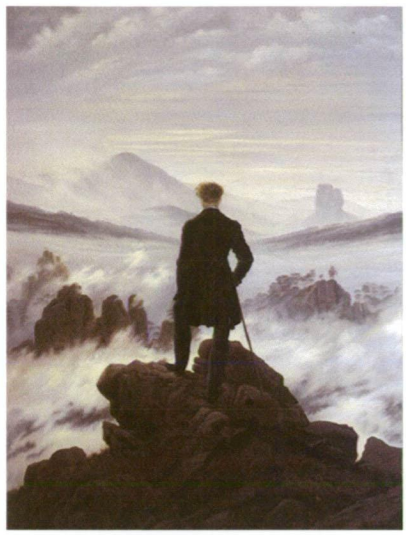

Fig. 21. Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818.

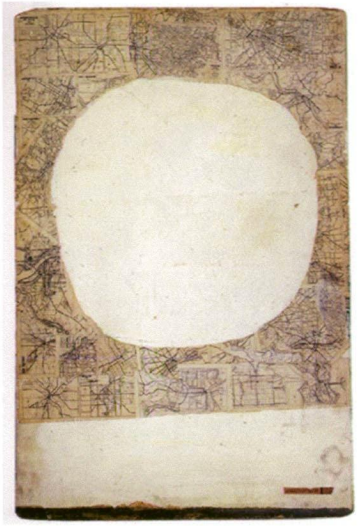

Fig. 22. Robert Rauschenberg, *Mother of God*, 1950.

possibility of absence. Unlike Friedrich whose work contextualizes the Sublime in the landscape, Newman chooses cool reductive formalism to present the unpresentable.[89] Rauschenberg, on the other hand, favours a more physical and material approach to the subject. In *Mother of God*, 1950 he uses found diagrams and discarded maps of a city to allude to the destruction caused by nuclear weapons. Community despair toward the Cold War is the principle impetus for the construction but the aim is to emphatically represent annihilation and desolation. In the essay "Nothing, Apocalypse and Utopias", Charles Gere describes this work as " bleak representations of nothing..." containing " a powerful utopian charge."[90] This utopian charge is the hope and desire for something more because, as Bergson implies in "Nothing", everything is possible. When Rauschenberg laboriously erases a de Kooning drawing he not only pays homage to de Kooning but also processes the idea of "Nothingness" into the physical act of removing and deleting. In deleting one image he inadvertedly arrives at another. Thus even in erasure there is the potential for something more.

[88] Gussin, Graham. "Out of it", *Nothing*, p.11.
[89] Through a reductive dialogue, monumental scale, the duality of the fragmented surface and flat illusionistic space Newman maintained an overwhelming desire to confront a new sense of reality. His perception of something more materialised through something less.
[90] Gere, Charles. "Nothing, Apocalypse and Utopias", *Nothing* p. 60-61.

Pierre Bismuth declares " Never believe an artist who says their work is about nothing"[91] because there will always be other motives. He goes on to pronounce that "Nothing" is a decoy to embrace a critical attitude toward the social system and the bourgeois expectations of art that "constitutes a strategy that enables an artist to free his or her activity from any form of social pressure." In describing "Nothing" he speaks of the emptying out of ideas and of blank canvases, which he further terms as the belittling of the quality of art as a consumer object. If what he declares is true then the reversal of his argument could also be said to be true. That is, to load the canvas with images that pertain to strong "social pressures" or to declare that the work is about something other than "Nothing" could be perceived as an valid conceivable definition of "the production of artificial values".

Andy Warhol's Nothingness

Andy Warhol is the most obvious example of this quality. His endless repeated motifs, such as Coca-Cola bottles, postage stamps, movie stars and dollar bills, disgorge their contents rather than over-load them with definition. As Warhol himself says "...the more you look at the same thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel."[92]

In Warhol's *Elvis*, 1963, *Double Elvis*, 1963 and *Triple Elvis*, 1964 (Fig. 23), the emptying out of content and articulation of "Nothing" is fabricated through a complex yet reductive figure/ground relationship. Elvis is depicted as a life-sized portrait from a 1960s publicity still. He stands in frontal pose with a gun in his hand and a knife strapped to his side, glaring out into space, "confronting the viewer in a shoot-out stance".[93]

[91] Bismuth, Pierre. "Never believe an artist who says their work is about nothing: the culture consumer's fear of the void", *Nothing*, p.181.
[92]Polke, Sigmar. Marsden, Brice. Richter, Gerhard. Twombly Cy. Bleckner, Ross. Warhol, Andy. *In the Power of Painting*, Zurich, Alesco AG, 2000, p. 56.
[93] Bourbon, David. *Warhol*, Abradale Press, New York, 1989, p.147.

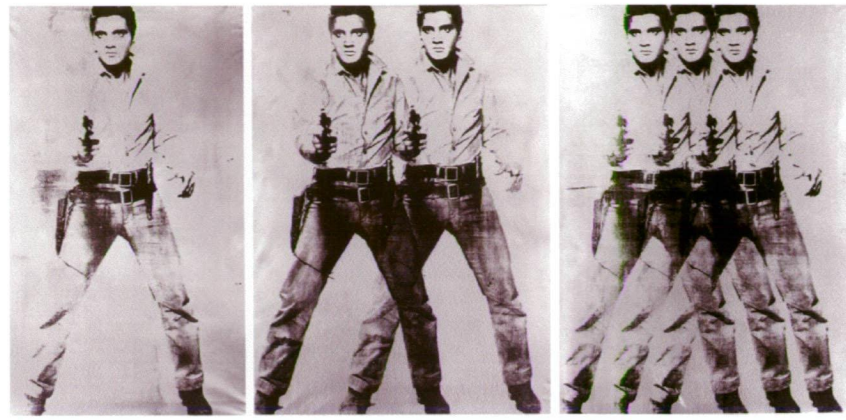

Fig. 23. Andy Warhol,
Elvis, 1963, *Double Elvis*, 1963 and *Triple Elvis*, 1963.

The canvas surface has a metallic sheen that is the result of the black silk-screened images applied over silver spray paint. The silver surface gives off a mirror-like shimmer, which leaps forward into space as the viewer's eye moves around the surface of the image and the monochrome figure shifts in and out of spatial clarity. This surface presents a space that continues beyond the frame and surface of the image. The silver paint functions as illusionistic rather than decorative and the ground itself optically suggests more depth than the screened figures. Any variation in tone is accidental and dependant on the process. The figure/ground relationship is not readily apparent, as the depth of the pictorial plane is reduced by the flatness of the screened mark.

American critic Robert Melville explains that it is the paradoxical articulation of space that suggests the concept of "Nothing". "The ...work is in short a paraphrase of the blank surface it adheres to...(it) is an ingenuous way of painting Nothingness." [94] It is Warhol's implied sense of nothingness that displaces these images from straightforward iconic representations to a calculated commentary on contemporary society, as well as contemporary image-making techniques. There is a sophisticated dumbness *or* "superficial naivete"[95] in the presentation of these images that disguises the elaborate nature of Warhol's reduction. This

[94] Melville, Robert. "Sewing is connection", *New Statesman*, April 7, 1967, p.481.
[95] Ganis, William, V. "Andy Warhol's Iconophilia", *Invisible Culture*, Issue 3 Winter, 2000.

reduction appears simplistic yet the implications are more resounding than first acknowledged. The singularity of Warhol's vision critiques the artistic dilemmas of 'originality' and the 'authentic'. By repeating the figure of Elvis (*Double Elvis*, 1960 and *Triple Elvis*, 1960) Warhol is in fact making a copy of a copy (the image is a publicity still). Warhol presents a picture that evokes the perpetual reproduction of photography and machinery. In these images the viewer shuffles from one Elvis to the next trying to discern differences between the figures. The viewer's movement across the surface animates the figure from static cut-out to jittery dancer and in this action the notorious sway of Elvis's hips is almost perceivable. The juxtaposed figures become a barrier between the shifting ground and the viewer. They stand in front of the surface of the picture plane and maintain the distance between viewer and context. The silver paint effectively becomes a *silver screen* that objectifies Elvis, the image. The subject, too, becomes a façade to the implied intention of the works. Elvis is chosen because of his celebrity status, his instantaneously recognizable face and the glamour of his rich and famous lifestyle. Yet none of these attributes are evident from Warhol's work. Warhol relies on the knowledge of the audience and knowledge of his other works to bring these characteristics to his imagery so that in reducing Elvis to a monochromatic outline the viewer is forced to "see" the mark of the silk-screen and uneven metallic ground. In these terms, Elvis becomes commodified[96] beyond the boundaries of personality and character to an ephemeral representation of deictic possibility.

The real question then, is what is left or how does the question of "Nothing" conclude? Logically the answer should be "Nothing" but, as already ascertained, the progeny of "Nothing" is not nothing but the possibility of something and within this

[96] It is acknowledged that the issue of value and commodity runs as a minor subtext within the conceptual aims of this project. These issues manifest themselves in the relationship of objects. See Chapter Seven, *The mythological object; the first decoy,* with special interest in Margit Rowell's interpretation of ' objects of desire' and also in the alluded precious nature of the mica glaze (see "The Pearl Surface" in Chapter Eight). Also see Baudrillard, Jean. *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected writings on the modern object 1968-1983,* Leichardt, NSW, Pluto Press, 1990 with reference to Part Three for more detail on this issue. It could be said that this too contributes to the overall sense of anxiety perceived in contemporary experience, however the parameters of this argument do not allow for this subtext to be extrapolated.

there is always an element uncertainty. This uncertainty is congruent in much of the rhetoric that surrounds contemporary culture.

Using toys and charged objects as Lacan calls a "floating signifiers"; the intention of my work is to disturb the association between subject and object and to dislocate form from content. The displacement, from the reality of the culture of objects and things, recalls the futility of the contemporary experience. It could even be said that contemporary culture itself is "... characterized by splits, and fissures, disjunction and dislocation and de-composition, a layered, complex collage of quotation in which code and message drift seemingly without anchor...".[97] In the endless emptying out of content, or aimless drifting, we are made aware of acute insecurities. It is the uncertainty or ambiguity that draws out the possibility of "Nothing" in the question of "Something" and the possibility of something in the question of "Nothing".

The gap that exists between the ideas of "Something" and "Nothing" demarcates the anxiety that is also present within the screen. The screen locates the tension between something and "Nothing' as a barrier from one reality to the next, from conscious to unconscious, from the external to the internal. The work executed within this project does not try to make sense of this anomaly but only tries to push the viewer into the abyss of this tension.

[97] Wilson, Andrew. *From Here*, London, Waddington Galleries and Karsten Schubert, 1995, p.7.

Chapter Five:

Related Art Practices

The first section of this chapter deals with two artists who have always been of great interest to me. These artists - Giorgio Morandi and Yves Klein have directly influenced the formation of aims within my project. They were fundamental in composing the concept of alternative models of spatial articulation with an investigation of transcendental or metaphysical ideals. It was Morandi's use of domestic tableware that ignited an interest in conveying grander themes through the disguise of inanimate objects, and Klein who first initiated an interest in the representation of pictorial space.

The second section of this chapter deals with contemporary artists whose work participates in a formal methodology. These artists are Guo Jian, Kara Walker, Lisa Ruyter and Gary Hume. Their work has been influential both in appearance and in context. In many cases their work did not initiate the objectives of the project but were 'discovered', as these concerns were unfolding. Their work assists in placing this project in a contemporary context and substantiates some of the claims and concerns of the objectives. They were primarily chosen because of their depiction of subversive and charged associations. Whether their associations are social, political or racial, these artists effectively use such relationships to comment on the world around them. They were also chosen because they reveal other connections: Guo Jian's relationship with Chinese Cultural Revolution propaganda imagery; Kara Walker's formal use of the paper cut-out; Lisa Ruyter's compressed spatial articulation and 'not quite right' detail; and, lastly, Gary Hume's witty social critique as well as his reductive semi-abstract approach.

Giorgio Morandi: Through Object to Idea

Morandi's work could easily be overlooked. His images are quiet, unassuming and repetitive. Yet his use of everyday ordinary

objects in similar limited settings is full of uneasy contradictions. They are at once beautiful and awkward, simplistic and profound. What first strikes me about Morandi's work is its silence; it has the ability to quietly resonate a concentrated complexity. The first impression is one of roughly sketched utilitarian objects that are often asymmetrical, heavily outlined and clumsily grouped. The composition is often elementary and always frontal. However, one can not look at Morandi's work quickly, it's appreciation requires time.

The familiarity of the objects and the domestic intimacy of the scene entice the viewer to look closer, deeper, inside the work. The bottles, bowls and jugs are all recognizable, comfortable acquaintances. There is no sense of intimidation with such objects, they are used every day and their function is well understood.[98] They are rendered, as they would present themselves, coarse and weighty. They appear timeless, as if they have existed in their arrangements for eternity, just gathering dust.

There is never any indication of the contents of the vessels. Their openings are alluded too, but (mostly) we never see into them. It does not seem important that they are containers of nothing or closed receptacles - their functionality becomes obsolete. Instead Morandi bestows upon his objects a sense of 'otherness' that is defined in the simplicity of his rendering. He "... regarded still life painting as a way of transcending time, of confronting "inert objects," of meditating upon "inherent beauty and spending an eternity in placid contemplation."[99] While his vision may not be seen as radical, he was able to present representation as a mythical construct that denies both narrative and functionality. His objects hover somewhere between abstraction and representation but his focus concerns neither of them.

The one work that I personally return to time and time again is *Natura Morte*, 1957 (Fig. 24), in the collection of the Art Gallery

[98] Within the visual arts tradition the bowl, bottle or utilitarian object has not obtained distinguishing associations as say the objects of a *vanitas* still life. They may comment on cultural processes but we are not presented with heavy allegories as say the skull and candle as in a Bruyn the Elder painting.
[99] Wilkin, Karen. *Morandi*, New York, Rizzoli, 1997, p. 90.

of NSW. This is a small work with two simple bottles and a bowl rendered on a tabletop. The objects themselves seem to be insignificant in comparison to the negative space around them. In the gap between the two bottles, Morandi has charged the aporia with substance. It is no longer passive but is the most dominant element within the picture. By filling in this space with a vibrant block of orange paint he has managed to turn around the figure/ground relationship of the composition. The intriguing point about this action is that it does not appear to be out of place, but a perfectly orchestrated twist.

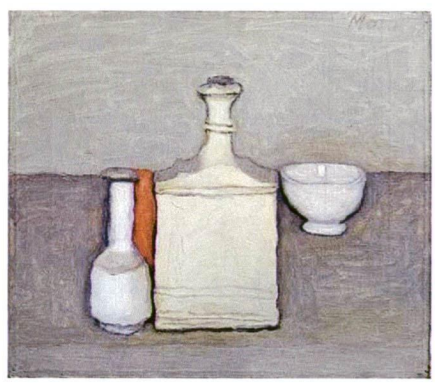

Fig. 24. Georgio Morandi, *Natura Morta,* 1957.

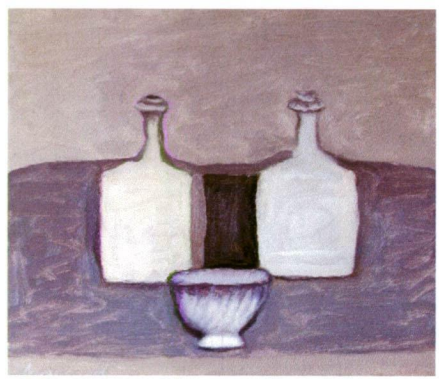

Fig. 25. Georgio Morandi, *Natura Morta,* 1959.

In an article by Siri Hustvedt, David Sylvester is quoted as describing Morandi's late works as closely related to the cityscape.[100] He compares the bottles to cathedrals and suggests that the colours within the works are the same as those of almost any Italian town. Hustvedt goes on to add that within Renaissance painting the use of architectural forms served as a mystical idea of harmony and order that went beyond the merely seen. Morandi himself not only borrowed from this tradition but extrapolated on these classical ideals. Hustvedt then considers the human body within this role and asks the reader to "consider the boundaries between one body and another - all bodies both inanimate and animate."[101] She goes on to explain that Morandi is not painting bottles as cityscapes, and jugs as human figures, but producing

[100] Hustvedt, Siri. "Not Just Bottles", *Modern Painters,* Vol. 11, No. 4, Winter 1998, p. 20.
[101] *ibid.*, p. 24.

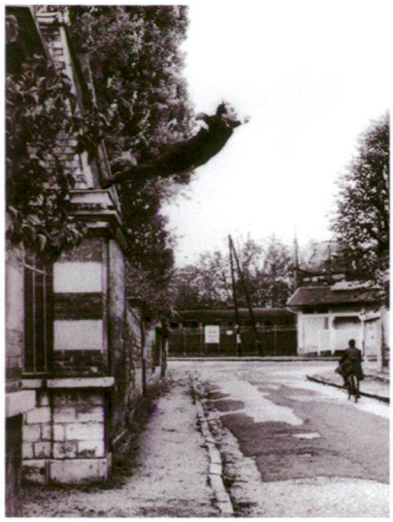

Fig. 26. Yves Klein, Leap into the Void, *1960.*

the pivotal point of departure from one world to the next is immortalized. He has left one reality, one pole, and is moving through to the one beyond. This detail is the most important in terms of my own practice - at this point, we are very much aware that Klein is *between* two physical realities - the ledge and the ground. His jump maps an existential pilgrimage, at the moment *between*; he is purged of the impurities of his physicality. The transition from the conscious to the unconscious, from the known to the unknown, from idea to reality, is represented by this quantum leap. In this image, time, space and reality disappear and Klein is able to transcend the materiality of the world (the materiality of the world however, is not out of sight). In doing so, his act (which becomes image) transposes an external event into an internalized "void". This leap was also poised within contemporary experience. During the 1960s there was an extensive interest in space travel.[106] Klein seized this opportunity to immortalize himself as a super-fiction within a contemporary consciousness.

In *Leap into the Void* 1960, Klein flirts with artifice through a superficial construction of the image yet he suggests through this leap of faith, that perception does not rely on any one sense alone.

[106] *ibid.* Notions concerning the dimensions and appearance of outer space were very prevalent in social consciousness. What was once only possible in the imagination now seemed possible in reality and it is this point that Klein exploits.
[95] *ibid.*

"... form that evokes idea rather than thing." So that "[t]he object - bottle, cup, cloth, vase - recedes into some larger mystery."[102] Morandi perhaps summarizes these ideas best himself when he says, " I believe that nothing can be more abstract, more unreal, than what we actually see. We know what we can see in the objective world, as human beings, never really exists as we see it and understand it. Matter exists, of course, but has no intrinsic meaning of its own, such as the meanings that we attach to it. We can know only that a cup is a cup, that a tree is a tree."[103]

Yves Klein; The painter of space

I am a painter of space. I am not an abstract painter but, on the contrary, a figurative and realist painter. Let's be honest, in order to paint space, I must put myself on the spot, in space itself. [104]

Yves Klein, 1960.

Like Gerhard Richter, Yves Klein is a difficult artist to discuss in a generalized way. Instead of making sweepingly broad statements about his work I have decided to focus on just one work, which succinctly describes many of his major concerns.[105] The choice of this work is not a hard one. It is an image that again seems to be perpetually relevant to my practice and it is one that I continue to look at and continue to ponder. It was in the engagement with this work that ideas pertaining to the representation and articulation of pictorial space, and the context surrounding them, first became of interest.

In the constructed photomontage *Leap into the Void*, 1960 (Fig. 26), Klein employs himself as the model that incredulously journeys between the physicality of a ledge and the concreteness of the ground. Klein is caught mid flight, in a seemingly impossible journey. As Klein leaves the security of the balcony,

[102] *ibid.*, p. 23.
[103] Wilkin, K. *op.cit.*, p.122.
[104] Stich, Sidra, *Yves Klein*, London, Hayward Gallery, Canz, p.217.
[105] Klein's *Blue Monochrome* paintings are discussed further in Chapter Eight; *Inanimate Desire (series #1).*

Perception coupled with emotion or sentiment can invoke realms of the unseen. By claiming he was a "painter of space" and initiating a poetic investigation through his jump, Klein's aim was to push the boundaries of both pictorial and physical space to a dimension of spiritual significance. This image is also indicative of Klein's other work as it clearly demonstrates his interest in intangible entities such as "the void", levitation and the description of "the ethereal sphere where materiality disappears and the self loses its individuality" and the "indeterminate presence".[107] His interest in such ideas pertains to a general thematic treatment of 'otherness' but it was also "comprehensive of almost all controversies of modern art." [108] Thus, through a committed understanding of contemporary experience Klein was able to insinuate concisely a connection to the everyday but allude to ideas that extended beyond and outside it.

Contemporary Artists

Guo Jian's Political Dancing Satire

Chinese born artist Guo Jian uses a combination of girlie magazine imagery, old photographs and propaganda poster imagery to construct the images within the *Mama's Tripping* series of paintings. They are an hyribization of political satire, Chinese folklore and Chinese culture.[109] Originally trained as a military artist Guo Jian uses the imagery of revolutionary musicals as a source for his garish and camp large-scale canvases. These

[108] Lee, Yongwoo. "Fusing Otherness", *Yves Klein*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Norway, 1997, p.198.

[109] Whilst researching material for the propaganda images I first came across the reference material of the *Mama's Tripping* series as a set of original postcards in Beijing. These postcards depict scenes from a revolutionary opera that was immensely popular in China known as *The Red Detachment of Women*. It was set in a South Pacific style landscape with palm trees and a chorus line of dancers brandishing rifles and hand guns. Guo Jian reports that its popularity was not due to the political nature of the musical but because women appeared on stage with very short skirts. During the 1950s (and still today) overt sexuality is publicly frowned upon. Musicals of this type were common during this time as a family pastime and they are still popular on television in China today (Fig. 29).

musicals were popular events during the Cultural Revolution and a common source of propaganda. However, Guo Jian's images depict self-portraits collaged onto the stage of the musical along side a chorus line of girls in shorts with guns. The chorus line and stage settings are lifted straight from the promotional postcards or posters used to advertise the musicals, with Guo Jian subverting the original imagery with popular western motifs and sexual overtones. In *Trigger Happy IX,* 1999 (Fig. 27), the last row of

Fig. 27. Guo Jian, *Mama's Tripping IX,* 1999.

chorus dancers is a line of swimsuit-clad, smiling girls wearing Marlboro caps and logos. They appear as promotional girls usually present at all major sporting and public events, offering up the sponsor's name and selling their products to their captive audience. In *Trigger Happy X*, 2000 (Fig. 28), a couple is fornicating standing-up between a graceful troop of leaping young girls waving white handkerchiefs, and a group of kneeling Guo Jians. They, too, seem to be caught up in sexual excitement. They are dripping with perspiration and lunge lustfully forward in foaming pink gunk. The fornicating male with traditional shaven head and ponytail is watching the audience watch him. He is taking great delight in his own exhibitionism and voyeurism; the woman is lost in the libidinous moment. Frothing waterspouts and an exploding helicopter complete this bizarre sexually charged setting.

Fig. 28. Guo Jian, *Mama's Tripping X*, 2000.

Guo Jian's vision is a bold and brash account of the corrupt self-gratification of the state combined with the restrictive and purist lifestyle that old socialist values dictate. His humour is direct, ostentatious and gross, and the viewer laughs at the absurdity of the imagery in spite of the "loaded" context. The images are at once ironic and poignant as it is often difficult to determine at just what point Guo Jian is being subversive and at what point he is having fun. It is the coupling of the political propaganda and historical imagery with perverseness and kitsch that makes the *Mama's Tripping* series relevant to the objectives of my project.

Fig. 29. Original images from promotional postcards of *The Red Detachment of Women* opera, 1971.

Kara Walker and the silhouetted stereotype

The work of Kara Walker was chosen for two reasons. Firstly; she uses a traditional paper technique as her representational process and secondly; her subject is highly charged and deals with social and political issues. She produces large-scale mural-like panoramas as paper silhouettes littered with fragmented scenes that construct a fabled, stereotyped and strangely poignant account of the ante-bellum South. The characters are often derogatory generalizations on 'southern mythology'. [110] She manipulates these in contorted sexual and violent scenarios that have been hand-drawn onto the back of sheets of black paper, exquisitely cut out, waxed and glued onto pristine white walls.

She, however, does not limit herself to black stereotypes, but depicts white stereotypes as well. The confederate solider can be seen suckling the breast of a young slave girl (Fig. 30), or the prim southern belle in full-skirt and laced bodice engaging in anal sex

Fig. 30. Kara Walker, *The Battle of Atlanta,* 1995.

with a black slave whilst reaching up to pick an apple from a tree. Her characters are often engaged in activities such as paedophilia, bestiality, masturbation, rape, murder, and other acts of violence

[110] These include black slaves, cotton pickers, Sambos, Mammies, Uncle Toms, as well as "pickaninnies" and " nigger wenches" (her own descriptions).

and sexual misconduct. They vomit, fart, shit and explode and in doing so allude to other social and political issues such as slavery, voodoo, racial and gender discrimination, racial clichés, power struggles and civil rights.

Despite the tawdry actions of her characters, her work has a beguiling clarity and civility. The violence is tempered by the humorous stereotypes and although the history she presents is not a romanticized one it has a certain poetic nature. This has been attributed to the "old-fashioned"[111] and "formal elegance"[112] of the paper-cut silhouette. The medium itself is whimsical and fastidious and the paper lends an air of fragility and ephemerality to an otherwise gaudy content. Walker's lines are fluid and graceful which recalls the prim custom of silhouette cutting of the eighteenth century.[113] Walker, however, takes the polite Victorian craft and twists it into an idiosyncratic *schlock* horror.

She describes using the silhouette as " a way to condense broad polarizing emotions or issues, issues of race and sex..."[114] Walker goes on to say that the silhouette is "...a blank space, but it's not a blank space, it's both there and not there..."[115] It is within this double edge or incongruity that an uneasy acceptance or unwilling engagement is fostered. Her work is attractive rather than subversive, but the attraction is in a constant state of flux.[116] Her works fluctuate from moralistic, satirical and quaint, to fantastical and strange. They "play coyly with concealment and disclosure"[117] and the "silhouette form itself involves a constant ambiguity between positive and negative, imprint and void."[118] This emphasizes the absence of the body with the presence of only the shadow. The reductive and simple monochromatic shadow

[110] These include black slaves, cotton pickers, Sambos, Mammies, Uncle Toms, as well as "pickaninnies" and " nigger wenches" (her own descriptions).
[111] Cameron, Dan. "Kara Walker, Rubbing History the Wrong Way", *On Paper*, Vol. 2, No.1, 1997, p.11.
[112] Frankel, David. "Kara Walker, Wooster Garden", *Artforum*, Vol. 37, No. 8, April 1999, p.122.
[113] When this technique first became popular with ladies of middle-class social standing and it was executed as a parlour-room entertainment.
[114] Kara Walker in interview with Jerry Saltz, "Kara Walker, Ill-Will and Desire", *Flash Art*, Vol. 29, No. 191, 1996, p. 82.
[115] *ibid.*
[116] Frankel, David. *op.cit.*, p.123.
[117] Camhi, Leslis. "Art Cutting Up", *Village Voice*, April 9, 1996.
[118] Frankel, David. *op.cit.*

denies all personalised detail and only narrates archetypal generality. The flat, bland shadow instigates a sense of purity and ease that is confused but not lost in the overall thematic treatment. The generality and simplicity, however, is more than merely general and more than just simple. In the installation *Slavery! Slavery!* 1997 (Fig. 31), Walker has described a menagerie of characters all luridly focused on their own actions, oblivious both

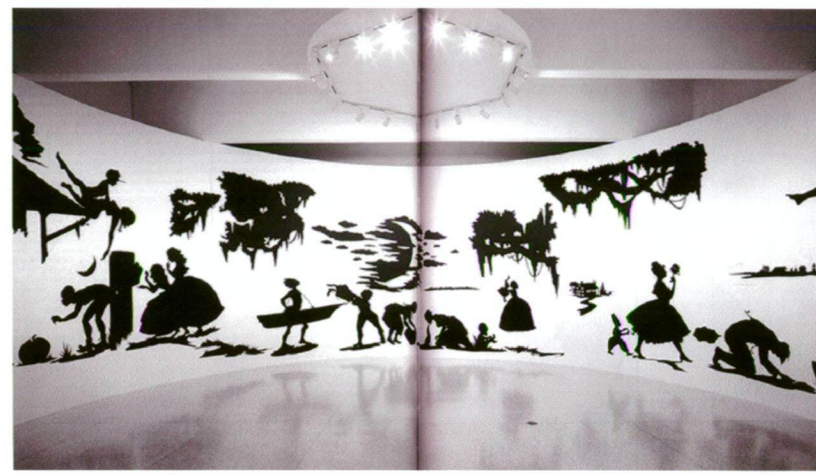

Fig. 31. Kara Walker, *Slavery Slavery!* 1997.

to the viewer and each other. A young couple is copulating on a pitched roof, the young black girl with afro hair and tight plaits mindlessly lets her piece of watermelon fall onto a bent-over naked black boy during her ecstasy. The boy is peering inquisitively at an egg hatching a human form whilst backed up against a wooden gate. The keyhole of the gate marks the position of his anus and two well-dressed young white girls with flowing hair and full-skirts are mischievously trying to insert a key into the hole. In another detail, a bedraggled beggar is crumpled up on the ground, farting onto an elegant woman parading around with a theatrical mask. A midget wearing a fez and ballooning pantaloons is conspicuously following her and squirting perfume up her ruffled skirt. The entire scene is both farcical and ironic in its cartoon-like simplicity, but the lightness of Walker's touch belies the dark underbelly of her highly charged imagination. The elaborate gestures and detailed line create an eloquent and dynamic drama, one in which the viewer and the characters are constantly caught up in an endless cycle of defilement and violation. The transition from "passive observer to

active involvement" [119] is an integral evolution into Walker's seductive yet omnipotent world of collusion. We are confronted with the baseness of human nature and a compelling yet unsettling beauty that is mordant and cynical.

Lisa Ruyter and the "paint by numbers" social nightmare

Lisa Ruyter's paintings look like brashly coloured colouring-books or paint-by-numbers pictures with a peculiar intensity in the twitching black outlines and the over bright colours that display an eerie familiarity. Her flat, uniform surfaces and acidic "Day-Glo" colours such as vivid lemon yellow, fluoro lime green, process blue and astringent apricot, seem too flat, and too regular. There is something not quite right in the way she uses colour, the informality of the subjects, and the shallow frontal pictorial construction. It is the "nearly right" or not being able to "match the right colours to their corresponding numbers"[120] quality that bestows on her work an ambiguity and anxiety that is both compelling and alluring. The colour choices and tonality are simultaneously dull or insipid and intensely vibrant. The "fill-in the blanks" [121] methodology of her paintings appears deceptively simple.

Her paintings are composed from her own snapshot images of suburban America. Once photographed these everyday scenes are projected onto canvases prepared with a flat monochrome ground. They are then drawn directly onto the canvas surface with a ball point pen and painted in. Special attention is paid to the regularity and evenness of the paint application. When the colour application is completed the outlines are re-applied using a black marker pen. Ruyter tries to eliminate the touch of the hand with the mechanical flat surfaces but this over-exactness is turned on its head when she re-draws the black outlines with a nervous excitement that electrifies the entire surface.

[119] Janus, Elizabeth. "As American as Apple Pie", *Parkett*, No. 59, 2000, p.140.
[120] Nickas, Bob. "People Make Paintings to Prove They Exist", *Terma Celeste*, Italy, March-April 1999.
[121] *ibid.*

The apparently uncomplicated technique draws the viewer into her reconstituted narratives only to find once they are there, everything is not as it seems. Like the pensive calm of a b-grade horror movie, Lisa Ruyter establishes an isolated emptiness and loneliness in her work, which has been compared to Edward Hopper[122]. With titles such as *Killpoint*, 2000, *Back Door to Hell*, 2000, *The Dead Zone*, 2000, *Punishment Park*, 1999 (Fig. 32), *Compromising Positions*, 1999 and *Badlands*, 1998 (Fig. 33), her images allude to the darker side of society. These pictures are beguiling representations of the everyday. A lone figure walks across a remote pedestrian crossing in *The Dead Zone*, 2000; a young woman reads a magazine on a park bench in *Killpoint*, 2000; or, a simple view of the space between two houses in a suburban neighbourhood occurs in *The Bridge over the River Kwai*, 1999: these are but a few examples.

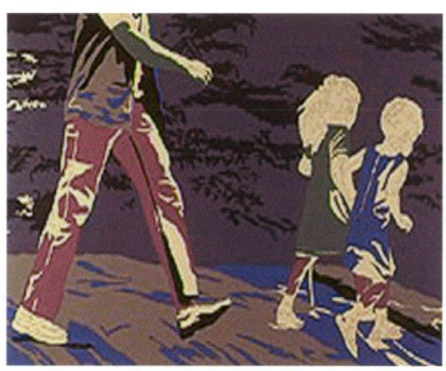

Fig. 32. Lisa Ruyter, *Punishment Park*, 1999.

Fig. 33. Lisa Ruyter, *Badlands*, 1998.

There seems to be nothing out of the ordinary about the pictures themselves except the fact they all seem strangely uninhabited. The figures she employs do not describe any narrative nor do they have personalities or distinguishing character traits, they are rigid in their movement and have no sense of life. They, too, are directly and blankly filled in and could just as well not be there. The combination of brightly polarized colour with the fragmented picture plane reminiscent of a primitive computer-generated paintbox filter or the "do-it-yourself" accessibility of Warhol's

[122] *ibid.*

colour-by-numbers furnishes the imagery with a capricious pensiveness. Everything becomes a cut-out, a flat façade that hides a sinister and psychologically intense secret. The shallow pictorial depth of the technique also becomes a screen, a ploy to divert from view the *"fucked-up"* desolation of suburbia.

Gary Hume: "The Beauty Terrorist"

A discussion of Gary Hume's work might seem a little out of place after considering the psychologically charged works of Lisa Ruyter and Kara Walker. Collectively, they share a commitment towards formal aesthetics, a compressed picture plane and flat-silhouetted figures but Hume's version of contemporaneity is far less foreboding and ominous than those of his American peers. If Ruyter and Walker are considered to be at one end of the spectrum with their subversive cerebral thrillers then Hume is at the other.

Hume's works appear to be casual and breezy and have a fresh, open charm about them. They depict simple motifs - flowers, movie stars, models - and they choose beauty as their mantra. However, all is not perfect in Hume's simple, cheerful world. Even when they "flirt with campness, are full of belief, and restrained exuberance",[123] they allude to an experience that is not as wholesome as first perceived. There is an uncertain edginess, sharp, colourful wit and uneasy compositional placement that removes them from being merely a celebration of pretty images to an astute and extremely subtle exploration of popular culture. Hume's subtlety is so well tempered that the viewer is intrinsically caught up in the sensation of the image rather than his citation to contemporary experience.

Hume's early series of "fifty, sixty odd"[124] doors are cool formal abstractions painted in the colours found in large institutions such as hospitals, operating theatres and psychiatric wards. Hume removes the horror and trepidation associated with such places and

[123] Robertson, Byran. "The Real Thing", *Modern Painters*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Summer, 1999, p. 26.
[124] Gary Hume from the interview by Adrian Dannatt, "The Luxury of Doing Nothing", *Flash Art*, Vol. 28, No. 183, Summer 1995, p. 98.

bestows on them directness and elegance that undermines any such relationship. His formality, too, becomes a screen that conceals the true subject of his content.

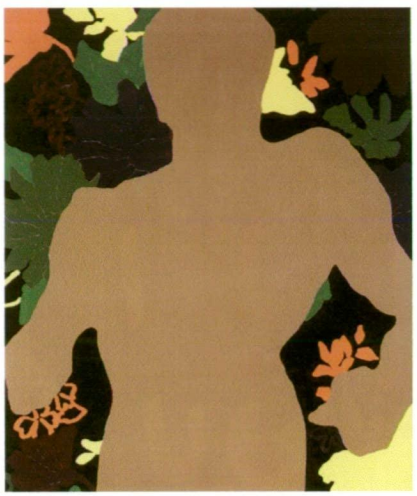

Fig. 34. Gary Hume,
Vicious, 1994.

Fig. 35. Gary Hume,
Kate, 1996.

Another concealing or veiling strategy Hume enlists is decoration. His use of decoration does not merely support a methodology for visual gratification. He uses it to pacify the viewer into a false sense of beauty.[125] In *Vicious*, 1994 (Fig. 34), the flowers that populate the background are not quiet, dainty motifs, "...they are on steroids. Bright and swollen like genetic mutations, they represent a form of artificially induced supernature".[126] Is the title *Vicious* another description of the flowers? Will the flowers transform into a strange man-eating monster and devour the figure or, as in the Lou Reed song of the same name will they "...hit you every hour"?[127] Like Warhol's flowers they become cultural signifiers that reflect an environment that is reduced to insincerity and devoid of sentimentality. They lack a traditional sense of beauty but they are still beautiful. They are rendered as inaccessible, dramatic, and synthetic. Yet it is in their over-stated decorative quality and in their dark portentous ground that they appear as exaggerated replicas. This approach perhaps can be best explained by Hume's definition of himself as a " 'beauty

[125] Muir, Gregor. "Vague", *Art and Text*, No. 51, May 1995, p. 42.
[126] *ibid.*
[127] From the album *Transformer*, Lou Reed, Oakfield Avenue Music Ltd, 1972.

terrorist' - one who terrorizes beauty and manipulates beauty to terrorize us."[128]

In the essay "Skin Jobs", Douglas Fogle describes Hume's canvases as the skin that "interfaces between the realm of subject and object, viewer and viewed..." and a surface that becomes like "make-up". [129] This skin or make-up could be similarly described as a screen. Added to the syrupy quality of his paint style, his choice of subject (super-models and movie stars) reiterates the obsession of society with appearance, the media and youth culture. Hume's models are not glamorous nor are they beautiful. In *Kate*, 1996 (Fig. 35), Kate Moss is depicted with her face sanded off. Is this an act of malicious irony or is it a constructed strategy to contradict his own super slick methodology? Maybe his intention is to subvert both. By erasing her face, he not only denounces the "look" of the enamel paint that he takes great pleasure in applying but also interrogates the iconography that he quotes from. In one firm act he manages to shatter the illusion of beauty and replace it with an ideology of fallibility. In discussing the process of choosing such images from fashion magazines and translating them into painted images, Hume explains that the paintings are "still made up". He goes on to say, "[t] hey are all total fictions."[130] At this point we are never sure if he is speaking about his paintings or referring to the media images from which he borrows. It is this detail that makes him so applicable to the context of this project.

[128] Muir, Gregor. *op.cit.*
[129] Foglé, Douglas. "Skin Jobs", *Parkett*, No. 48, 1996, p.31.
[130] Muir, Gregor. *op.cit.*, p. 43.

Chapter Six:

China Residency

China: the military and propaganda imagery

During the course of this project, a residency in China was undertaken. From this residency further interest developed in the roles of military and propaganda imagery.[131] When in China it was a common sight to see a battalion of tanks, armed vehicles or marching troops passing by. Several events prompted the fascination with such a discourse - including witnessing the precursory fanfare of a public execution;[132] and a military parade, which was the principle event of the October 1st celebrations. At the latter, an estimated crowd of one million people watched a steady flow of marching troops, tanks, and armed vehicles parade their strength around Tiananmen Square. This parade was a spectacular display of power and potential violence; it was incredibly beautiful. The regal quality of marching troops; the unified movement; and formal elegance of the entire scene was unlike anything I had ever witnessed. It was slightly over-cast on this day, and everything appeared within a general blur of khaki green and dusty red. The lure of propaganda can draw upon aesthetic sensibilities - precision, ceremony and harmony. It was thrilling, exciting and hypnotizing. These experiences only reinforced my attraction to the toy solider as a motif for this project.

Propaganda imagery was sourced during this trip as potential reference material. This imagery was used in China during the

[131] The toy soldier had already been established as the subject of the paintings prior to this residency. The interest in the military etc, was a secondary influence. It, however, re-enforced the relevance of this subject in the context of the project.

[132] A ring of drug dealers had been sentenced to death for the manufacture of large quantities of amphetamines. These men were well known businessmen and respected within the community. A large party or send off was planned for them. They all got very drunk before they were placed in the back of open military vehicles. Ricky Martin's *Cup of Life* was broadcast from the vehicle's megaphones. The prisoners were paraded around the city before cheering crowds and then driven into the centrally located Worker's Stadium and shot in front of an equally large crowd.

periods of great reform and it is still found in second-hand markets and antique stores. Most of it took the form of larger scale posters and post-cards.[133] The posters were of two distinct varieties: the first were rough coloured wood-block prints (usually two colours) (Fig. 36): the second, a full-colour screen-printed image with painterly illustrations or graphics (Fig. 37).[134] It was the first of these two varieties that became influential in later stylistic developments.

Fig. 36. Found propaganda poster, circa 1972.

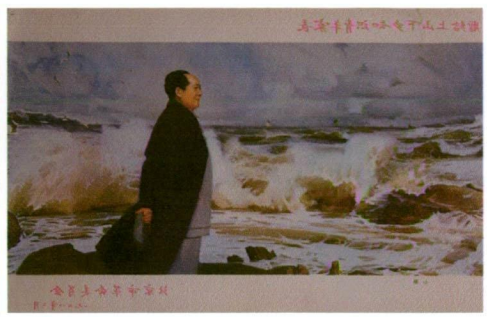

Fig. 37. Found propaganda poster, circa 1978.

Such imagery was accessible, inexpensive and everywhere. Through the combination of art and advertising, it promoted the ideas and influences of the State. It was a powerful device in selling political, social and economic ideas. These images were openly sensational and used pastoral settings and themes to persuade audiences of their message. Images of work, of family lifestyles, and of the youthful united-front working towards a revolutionary state were popular themes. The most successful of these images always had an emotional content and were often an idealized representation of places and events. They were clear and uncomplicated so those who were unable to read would have no doubt about the intent. The text too, was plain and direct and would often pinpoint various professional or social groups.[135] The cheap, efficient, pliant nature of these images was anything but simple.

[133] A small series of paper-cuts found at this time also formed part of this material. They became very important in later bodies of work but the propaganda imagery within them seemed to be an isolated occurrence.
[134] These painting were executed by military artists trained and employed by the state for such purposes and usually depicting families, or women, being "good revolutionaries"; or Mao-tse Tung in idyllic settings.
[135] Such slogans included " Teachers are good revolutionaries" or "A good revolutionary woman has many children."

Behind the smiling faces was a message of sacrifice and struggle giving rise to the contradictions of the idealized State and the participation in the revolutionary cause.

The physical quality of these posters had a significant influence on my own images. They were often printed on newsprint and the thinness and cheapness of the paper quality would soften the printed colours. With time certain colours faded into subtle shades whilst others remained vibrant. Some colours such as the typical 'revolutionary red', always seemed to be more dominant. Many were torn or ripped from age. There is a general air of fragility and loss about the overall appearance of these images as they appear today. The figures and illustrations have an old-world quality about them. This absence or sense of loss is both familiar yet foreign, and it is this point that imbues these images with a distant pathos that is concurrently charming and bewitching.

PART THREE: DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

In order to explore the propositions outlined in the central argument a broader content was required.[136] This subject was originally conceived as an examination of 'loaded' objects as vessels for universal emotions and intimacies. Such objects were established as nostalgic and this included anything that was considered used, second-hand or old-fashioned. Within the early stages of the project, objects such as souvenirs, heirlooms, mementos, toys and figurines were used to lull the viewer into a false sense of familiarity by registering an emotive connection or dramatized association. This dramatized association was intrinsic to the nature of the object, as well as, for the creation of links between the implied relationship of the artist and the imposed relationship between the artist and the viewer. The association presumed a lost narrative, which was not alluded to within the painted images. The objective of these works was to present objects as iconic images or motifs that displayed a state of modulated tension between content and subject - the latter divorced from its narrative - figure and ground; the reality of the painted surface; and the reality of the pictured image. Throughout the project this aim has always remained constant, although a variety of objects were utilized in order to establish a mediated contextual response.

This section of the paper locates the use of objects within the context of my own practice and maps the course of the studio development. It is separated into three areas: the first examines the conceptual ideas established in such themes; the second discusses each body of work in detail; and, within this, is a discussion of the technical problems and outcomes of the practical applications. These appear as an indentation to the main body of text.

[136] This contextual investigation may have been developed without " a broader content" that is, through a purely abstract and non-representational guise. The central reason for not developing a non-representational context was that my previous practice was located within abstraction. As discussed later within this chapter, pure abstraction had always alluded to other symbolic associations - as seen within the Modernist tradition. Such associations are relevant in this context but a more contemporary approach was needed. By using specific objects the project could comment directly on current imagery and the location of that imagery within contemporary experience.

Chapter seven:

From mythological object to toy soldiers

The mythological object: the first decoy

Looking back over my practice in previous years, an articulation of pictorial space had always driven the principle objectives and explorations. In the past, abstract form and shape were used rather than representational images. The prevalent reason for this shift from pure abstraction to a recognizable motif or object was a desire to implicate a controlled tension or uncertainty between the representation of the subject (object) and the ambitious formality of the surface space. The commonplace or inanimate object as a fragment of some other external reality has always alluded to another context or another meaning.[137] Presented in an ambivalent fashion, devoid of emotion (yet not of sentimentality) such objects were both denied and celebrated as narrative signifiers. Roger Malbert in the exhibition catalogue for *It's a Still Life* remarks that to consider such themes "... generally requires a disinterested, contemplative frame of mind". Such subjects allow "... shelter for speculation, formal analysis, imaginative continuities and reverie...". [138] It was the combination of this 'other' reading and the affect of abstract pictorial space that held complex possibilities.[139]

[137] This can be clearly demonstrated in the tradition of Dutch still life painting. In such works, specific objects held symbolical meanings. For example, the skull and candle represented a broader theme of death as seen in a typical *momento mori* picture. The abundance and plenitude of excess was another reference commonly alluded to in this discourse. It could be witnessed in such objects as cups filled with money or tables laden with food as in the *vanitas* pictures.

[138] *It's a Still Life*, exhibition catalogue, London, Arts Council Collection and The South Bank Centre, 1989, p. 6.

[139] Throughout the history of painting, pictorial space described through formal and abstract manipulations had always pertained to other symbolic affiliations. Malevich's interest in other dimensions was located within the square, *Black Square (1915),* Ad Reinhart's monochromes have spiritual overtones and Mondrian's formality too, became a strategy. Mondrian believed he could unify the forces of nature and the ego of the individual through a representation of geometry to create a "dynamic equilibrium and reveal the true content of reality". Chipp. H.B, *Theories of Modern Art,* California, University of California Press, 1968, p.353.

These initial subjects were termed *mythological objects*[140] because of their nostalgic worth and constructed histories. They included such objects as milk jugs, porcelain figurines, and antique busts, religious statues and toilet dollies. They are not valued for any reason other than they had lived and experienced another existence - one to which the viewer can never be privy. It was through an anticipation of their presence that a perceived absence was acknowledged. Thus through the concept of absence, a sense of something within "Nothing" was materialized.

The experience of the object creates a mythology that is able to suspend both time and death because it is unreachable in the present. Susan Stewart expresses this contradiction as, "the idealized body" of the object " implicitly denying the possibility of death..." such objects "attempt to present a realm of transcendence and immortality, a realm of the classic."[141] The suspension of these two primordial ideas instigates an obsession with the actual and a desire to return to the origins of its experience through the knowledge of the present. The mythological object thus develops into a signifier for experience. Its functionality is no longer its principle purpose as it now interacts with the human psyche as a manifestation of history through the guise of contemporary perception. But by distancing or removing the object from one reality (the past) and translating it into another (the present) it becomes a mediation of indifference and apathy. This process of translation exemplifies the mythological function of the object. Margit Rowell in a catalogue essay for the Museum of Modern Art describes these objects as "objects of desire" because "they and their interpretation and articulation embody ideological conventions and patterns, removed from the direct experience of the world."[142]As objects of desire, they hold a very different position in culture. They have managed to suspend time and within this suspension, they have become eternal. The sense of the eternal elevates them from the everyday and transforms them into symbols

[140] The discussion that follows pertains to the body of work *Inanimate Desire, 1999.* See Chapter Eight.
[141] Stewart, Susan. *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, and the Collection,* Baltimore & London, John Hopkins University Press, 1984, p. 133.
[142] Rowell, Margit. *Objects of Desire, the Modern Still Life,* New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1997, p. 11.

of transcendence and as such they are pertinent commentators on contemporary experience.

The methodology therefore established to examine such things was initiated through the guise of history (made explicit by the use of objects). This history was not intended to be that of a long forgotten era, rather one that was perceived as just beyond reach in the recent past. The fifteen paintings of Gerhard Richter's *Oktober Cycle*, 1988 (Fig. 38 & 39), also explicate the present by utilizing the events of the past as a contextual strategy.[143]

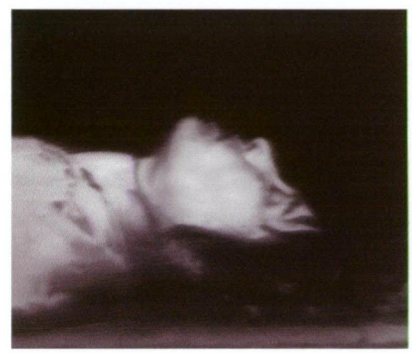

Fig. 38. Gerhard Richter, *Tote, 1988.*

Fig. 39. Gerhard Richter, *Plattenspeiler, 1988.*

Richter uses a historical guise combined with blurred black, white and grey imagery "as parables, as images of a possible form of social relation."[144] It is through re-documenting or re-visiting a closed event that he is able to give new meaning and insight to similar events within the present. Yet his is not a simple re-presentation of historical events. Through the estrangement of the viewer, by a painterly field of imprecision (the dragged brushmark), Richter "brings out what is hidden and implicit behind the official scene".[145] The sheltered brutality and out-of-focus rendering of detail heightens the suspicion surrounding the event. His "subversive" veiling of the photographs through the dragged brushwork removes the specifics of the incident to an

[143] These works are based on photographic documentation of the deaths of the last members of the German Red Army Faction (*BaaderMeinhof Gang*) in a West German prison in 1977.
[144] Richter, Gerhard. sourced from Benjamin H.D.Buchloch, "Interview with Gerhard Richter" , *Gerhard Richter: Paintings*, New York, Thames and Hudson, 1988, p. 22.

intuitive and enigmatic location. This location places "the event in a kind of representational limbo"[146] where the deaths of the prisoners remain perpetually current.[147] It is as if the past shelters the secrets of the present so that by re-constructing history a clearer understanding of contemporary experience can be established.

In utilizing objects with a perceived history in a similar fashion, that history is alluded too. In alluding to history it is acknowledged that an experience of loss or the unknown is fostered. It is within these conditions that the concepts of "absence", "the void", and "Nothing" also reside.

The toy solider: The second decoy

As the project developed it was necessary to reduce and isolate the inanimate object to one type of figurine.[148] The rationale for this being that with each object, a new set of relationships or associations began to emerge. This was confounded by the relationships particular objects had with one another. When images of different types of objects were presented together there was always a temptation to discover, or set up, some narrative between objects. In isolating the "mythological object" to one type of figure (the toy soldier), potential cross narrative was eliminated both within individual images and across series of works.

The toy soldier as a contemporary object has a paradoxical presence. As representations of human figures they suggest grander associations such as sentiment and emotion yet they intrinsically, are just things. This affiliation locates them within the everyday and within the still life genre. Charles Sterling in his book, *Still life Painting: from Antiquity to the Twentieth*

[145] Kuspit, Donald. "All Our Yesterdays", *Artforum,* April 1990, p.129.
[146] *ibid.*, p. 132.
[147] See Chapter Five, *Related Art Practices*, for further insights on artists working with highly emotive social and political contents.
[148] See Chapter Eight of this part of the exegesis, *Inanimate Desire (series #2)*, for insight into the choice of figurines.

Century,[149] makes the distinction between m*egalography* - or the depiction of greatness - and *rhopography*, which is the depiction of trivial objects; items that lack importance, the unassuming material base of life. *Megalography* implies the depiction of legends, heroes, gods, myths, historical battles and wars whilst *rhopography* assumes a connection with the ordinary and everyday. The toy soldier however, suggests both areas of mediation. As a *megalographic* object the toy soldier insinuates heroic themes such as war and as a *rhopographic* object, these figurines are both insignificant and unavailing.

The soldiers chosen for this context are generic, bland, and mass-produced in appearance. They are cheap, inconsequential in stature and dispensable. They have no real personality traits and no marketing strategies pushing the sale of them as more contemporary toys or figurines do - G.I Joe or Action Man toys. They are not associated with current popular culture although they are still found in most children's toy boxes. They are not promoted as being collectibles as they are purchased from the supermarket and not a specialist toy store or model maker's shop. Yet in their vast quantities each figure is slightly different. The cheapness of the material and quantity of production causes a slight distortion or imperfection in each and this slight convolution of their bodies and faces makes each unique. Even so, there is nothing remarkable about them and their small stature and sheer abundance makes them all the more trivial. They are easily overlooked. Even in the course of this project, I have had to purchase several packets of them. I do not their fate: their ordinariness makes them easy to misplace.

They are however, essentially toys and their function is to promote play and entertainment. They are seen as vehicles for childish pantomime and innocent revelry but as nostalgic tokens of *megalographic* themes they belie the naivete of childhood and impose an anxiety on the performance of play. They advocate confrontation with their armed appearances and they introduce ideas such as conflict, violence and spectacle into the innocence of

[149] Sterling, Charles. *Still Life Painting from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century,* New York, Harpers and Row, 1981.

game playing. They, like other such figurines, are contradictory objects within the culture of children. They promote the above listed ideas as accepted occurrences in everyday life and initiate the approval of them within society.

In their own right, they can be seen as abstractions as they are hypothetical constructs in an artificial world, and abstract representations of an archetypal figure. Their abstraction is fabricated by their reductive and generic appearance and generalized synthetic countenance. They are already governed by absence because they were created within the culture of that loss. They are standardized, yet their lack of representational value and lack of stature contributes to their contradictory position in the external world. It is this position that makes them appropriate for the objectives of this project.

The paintings executed during this project are not about toy soldiers or objects at all. Neither are they about the actuality of events or the reality of the situations to which such objects allude. As discussed above, there is a genuine interest in the culture of such images and objects. However in the context of my practice, the presentation of such images and objects offer no moral or ethical position, no alliance to either one side nor the other and no critique on the reality of such events. The use of such material therefore is a decoy that suggests, or leads the viewer to think they suggest, another motive. Consequently, the images created within this project are about the process of suggesting. They are about what lies in the possibility of behind, beyond, and between. They are about the anxiety and uncertainty of "Nothing".

In viewing my images there is nothing to gain. There is no sense of enlightenment. There is no path that is followed. The toy soldier (or other miscellaneous objects), the surface and fractured pictorial construction all document entropy. The toy soldier paintings carry the potential for violence but the pointed guns are never aimed at their targets. The plastic rifles are flaccid and impotent. The armed figures are a calculated artifice that suggests a disinterest in the larger theme of war, violence and subversion. The meaningless way in which the motif is presented and repeated signifies a void or disgorging of content, although the content is

never empty. This act, or lack of commitment towards such imagery, is intended to frustrate the viewer in light of the current climate. It offers a fiction that is never completed, never forthcoming and never conclusive. In the closed systematic referencing the toy soldier is intended to respond to moral consciousness without participating in the conflicting ethos of the contemporary experience. The soldiers are a false representation of reality and their falseness incites suspicion and caution. There is no point in trying to unravel the meaning or reasoning, as there is simply nothing to reveal. Their figurative nature is misinterpreted as a narrative construct but the narrative is not present and only thwarts the viewer when trying to draw associations. It is these factors that make such objects and images the appropriate context for an investigation into spatial ambiguity within the culture of contemporary painting practices.

Chapter Eight:

Bodies of Work

This part of the paper is designed to give additional insights into the conceptual concerns of individual series of work rather than a general overview. It focuses on individual pieces, as well as individual ideas and general themes that have proven to be significant in the on-going development of the project. In addition, it maps the progress of studio-based concepts that have been influential in the interpretation of the central argument. The major concerns, covered in this part, include: the determination of the contextual object; an alternative interpretation of the space of "Nothing" (i.e. *Purgatory* series); the paper-cut as an contributing medium and the reasons behind a shift in spatiality within the painted images.

Accompanying each explanation is a discussion of technical issues; these appear as an indentation to the main body of text. All techniques discussed have been developed exclusively to satisfy the aims as outlined in the central and contextual arguments. Some of these techniques have been an on-going investigation and have developed across several bodies of work. The titles of each relevant body of work appear in italics next to the technical information.

Inanimate Desire: series #1, 1998.

The first year of the studio-based investigation was spent formulating a suitable pictorial language that created a controlled tension or uncertainty in the ordinariness of the subject, and, an ambiguous formality within the surface space. This intention was a direct interpretation of the central argument - to establish the screen as a complex relationship of representational strategies.[150] At this stage of the research, Klein's *Blue Monochrome,* 1956 became a reference point and alluded to the kind of pictorial space aimed at.

[150] See Part One, *Central Argument*, for clarity on these characteristics.

By using the physicality of coloured pigment opposed to viscous colour, Klein was able to introduce an incongruity of dimension through the guise of flat colour. His surfaces portray an illusionary voluptuousness that draws the viewer into the perceived flatness. Despite their luxurious spatiality, they are simple expanses of flat colour laid upon a surface. Nevertheless, these monochromes depict much more than that; they characterize a paradox of extremes. They are at once minimalist, and, express a vast emptiness. They are seductive *and* fleshy.[151] This fluctuating movement from blank "ascetic existence" to "the presence of "the flesh"[152] results in highly-charged works that are simultaneously image and object. The restless state of movement between object and image unsettles the viewer with its direct materiality and immaterial sensitivity. It perpetuates an endless cycle of dualism.

The intended surface for my proposed paintings was one in which the viewer was invited into the plane of the image but then, just as quickly, forced out again.[153] That is, a movement of pictorial space that presents a mutable motion of diffusion and subversion. The intended result was the simultaneous engagement and disengagement with the subject and the spatiality of the image. At any one point the object or motif would appear to sit on and within the pictorial space as well as drop out or fall off the plane of the surface. The intention was to have the gaze of the viewer follow a similar path. The rendered object would appear to float within the space of the picture plane without a point of location or grounding. The dislocation of the object within the surface of the image draws the viewer into the painted surface but the flatness and banality of the ground does not allow for any further movement or investigation. The resulting undefined ground was nondescript, yet atmospheric and soft. The surface was intended to be anonymous

[151] Vuorikoski, Timo. "From Monochromes to Anthropometrics", *Yves Klein*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo, Sara Hilden Art Museum, Finland, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1997, p.183.
[152] *ibid.*
[153] This action could also be compared to Louise Hearman leaving exposed areas of the masonite support as described in Chapter Three, *Painting and the Metaphorical Screen.*

in appearance *and* in spatiality.[154] A vague tactility within the flatness was also proposed. In describing the possible reaction to this spatiality, an analogous experience might be perceived when entering a darkened room. The enveloping space of the blackness draws the participant with trepidation into the blackness, to find that once inside the space the blackness is caused only by a lack of room or emptiness.

Although there was no implied narrative or story to these works, the atmospheric ground alluded to a temporal resting-place between one world and another. These worlds or location are never described, never disclosed or never witnessed. All the objects and figurines that reside here are, simply passing through, or resting just outside the perceivable boundary of that world.[155]

The discussed aims and subsequent techniques are also indicative of the second body of work *Inanimate Desire: the mythological object.*

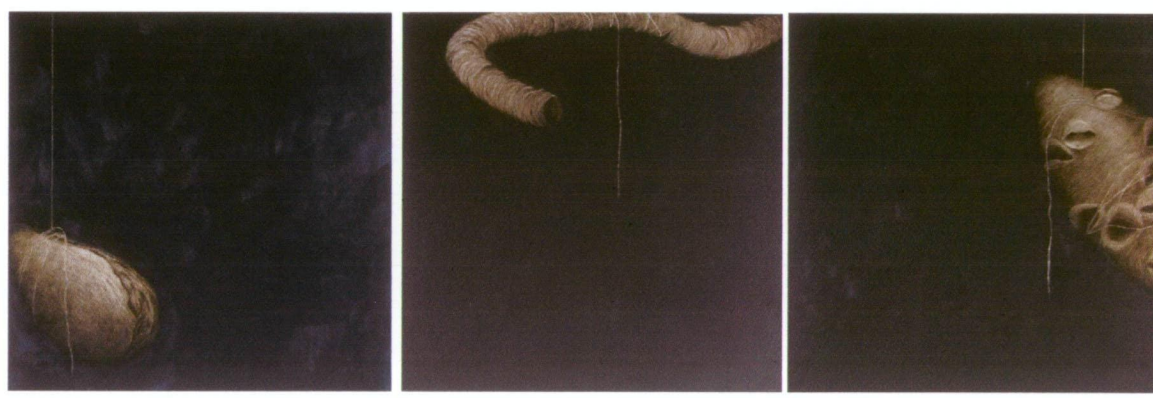

Fig. 40. *Purgatory,* 1998.
Oil and wax on canvas.

[154] The subject within these works was of secondary importance. A selection of organic objects such as seedpods and nuts were used. The series *Purgatory* was purchased by Artbank in 1999 and is housed in the Price Coopers Waterhouse building, Melbourne.
[155] See artist's statement in Appendix 2.1.

Ground Preparation no.1

Inanimate Desire; the untitled still life, 1998 and *Inanimate Desire: the mythological object,* 1999

> To achieve the above-described pictorial space the canvas support had to be prepared as smooth as a paper surface. This was achieved with many layers of commercial gesso, lightly sanded between each layer. Gesso was applied in this way until the weave of the canvas almost disappeared.[156] This usually required between 10-12 layers depending on the weave of the canvas.[157] Using a wet-in-wet technique and dragging the background oil colour over the top of a simply rendered object produced the surface. There were, however, major disadvantages to this technique. This process made it difficult to control the level of diffusing or blurring and the final colour contrast and tonality of the image were obviously reduced as well. It was established that a more flexible technique needed to be designed. The heavily gessoed support remained constant and a more traditional approach to building up the painting surface was used.[158]

Inanimate Desire: the mythological object (1999) (Series #2)

At the beginning of the second year, the conceptual argument had been firmly determined within the guise of nostalgic objects. At this point the research consisted of isolating specific objects to test their suitability as the signifier of "Nothing".[159] The second series from the *Inanimate Desire* body of work began to use a variety of found objects for this purpose. Two events prompted the selection of these objects, the first was moving into a house that was originally built in 1939 and occupied by the same owner until her death in 1999. Objects that had been left behind, within this house, were used as source material; they included such things as playing cards, toilet dollies and odd ornaments etc. This assortment of

[156] This was not the aim of the exercise, the weave of the canvas was never intended to be removed or denied. This was only the by-product of the intention to produce a surface that was soft to look at. In the later works the weave is returned.
[157] The canvas was later finalised as 12 ounce cotton duck.
[158] See Appendix 1.2 for a detailed explanation of this process.
[159] See Chapter Seven *The Something of "Nothing"* for a detailed explanation of this.

seemingly unrelated things had a very uneasy presence, not only were they relics of someone else's life, but they had the ability to allude to a reality that was absent from the present.

The second event was an exhibition at Linden Gallery, Melbourne. Linden Gallery is a late Victorian residence that once housed a large family and servants. In this exhibition the proposed aim was to address the history of the building through an installation of painted images that alluded to the types of objects found in the domestic setting of that era.

In this body of work the aim was to present the found objects in the same dubious quandary that the diaphanous ground had presented in the 1998 series. The objects were depicted with a 'leading edge' or exaggerated viewpoint so that a contrary form of spatial displacement occurred. Within this work the viewpoint was confined to looking down at the object from a relative height. This strategy was intended to produce a sense of visual vertigo or an agitated spatial definition. The objective was to place the

Fig. 41. *Ol' Man River,* 1999.
Oil and wax on canvas.

Fig. 42. *The Prize,* 1999.
Oil and wax on canvas.

objects within the ground instead of on or behind it so that they seemed to concurrently immerse into *and* out of an indefinite position. Hence, they would seem to topple out of the picture plane as well as sit flatly within it. The cut-out was introduced as a

constructional device to help push the objects in and out of the picture plane. The intention of the flat cut-out was to give the appearance of a shadow. This device reduced the narrative element within each work by imbuing the images with an uneasy formality.[160]

The objects were sourced from within the house or from auction rooms, or antique stores. As many of these were valuable or historical they were photographed on location.[161] The general selection prerequisite was that the objects must be figurative.[162] With such representations, there always appears to be other associations or contexts. This allusion and sense of 'other' became the significant factor in the final choice.

The final installation included small panels of flat colour treated in the same way as the larger paintings. These were presented alongside the other paintings and again functioned as a formal device to reduce the narrative aspects of the figurative works. They also operated like decorative swatches that cited the historical and domestic décor of the gallery (Fig. 43 & 44).

Fig. 43 & 44. Installation view, Linden Gallery, Melbourne. *Inanimate Desire: the mythological object,* 1999.

[160] These processes were established to construct a space similar to the flat/deep space of the technological screen. This is seen to be similarly structured to Inka Essenhigh's pictorial space. See Chapter Two, *The flat/deep space of the screen,* for a detailed description of this work.
[161] Where possible it was preferred that objects were painted from life rather than from photographic sources. All images were constructed using PhotoShop as described in the Appendix 1.1.
[162] Although other works using non-figurative objects such as candelabras and telephones were successful in terms of the objectives of the overall project, the figurative objects displayed a greater sense of encumbered ambivalence. See Chapter Seven, *From mythological object to toy soldiers,* for further reasoning on this limitation.

Construction of Images

Inanimate Desire: the mythological object 1999

All images from the 1999 series *Inanimate Desire* were photographed using a standard 35-mm SLR camera. Each object was photographed from a high vantage-point so that the viewer was looking down upon the object. The resulting image was one where the top of the object was sharply in focus and the rest of the detail dropped out of the picture and became blurred and indefinable.

The photographs were scanned into the computer using a low-resolution flat bed scanner and manipulated within PhotoShop 5.02.[163] These images were printed on an Epson 7500 colour printer at an approximate scale of 20cm x 20cm. By passing a diffusing filter over the entire screen image the final printed images had a close tonal relationship and the flat coloured background, a similar texture to the object. The objective of this procedure was to produce an image that appeared to exist behind a screen or veil without any discernible evidence of that veil. The computer images were transformed onto prepared canvases using an epidiascope.

Outcomes

Inanimate Desire: the mythological object, 1999

The above methodology only satisfied some of the aims of the proposed project. I particularly liked the way the density of the coloured ground was extremely flat, uniform, and regular, but also had an unusual enveloping quality. This surface fabricated a type of flatness that was not hard or impenetrable but one that was soft and enfolded around the object. The surface appeared flat but also gave the illusion of a deeper spatial plane. It was in the combination of flatness and softness (or plasticity) that the aims of the project began to materialize.

[163] This point is important to the development of the project as although I had an understanding of how digital images were constructed; it was the first time that a literal methodology of the screen entered the project. See Appendix 1.2 for further information regarding construction and painting of these images.

The disadvantages of this technique were that the painted surfaces were extremely vulnerable.[164] The heavily waxed surfaces were prone to marking even with the slightest touch and the excessive layering of gesso lessened the flexibility of the support. Another problem in this methodology was that it achieved a very unified and homogenized surface that had little or no variation in colour and tone. Although the unified and homogenized surface was a desired result, some level of colour variation needed to be implemented. This problem became more prominent over time as the wax medium began to discolour slightly and contributed to the further dulling of the images. This, at first, had been one of the aims of the experimentation but, after more consideration, a surface that was capable of greater tonal shift would have been more satisfactory.

The process had created some favourable outcomes including; the flat density of the coloured ground; and the stippled soft edge of the objects. The stippled edges[165] of the objects created a different type of illusionary blur. This blur sat above the surface of the ground and made the object hover or float in an undefinable location. The effect of the wet-in-wet technique caused the objects to sit below the surface of the paint and dissolve back into the space of the picture plane. The stippled blur did not lessen the tonal contrast (as the wet-in-wet technique had), as more paint could be carefully added to this technique after the surface had dried without discernible marks.

The Purgatorial Perspective, 2000 and *Jesus in Pinkitude*, 2000

Inanimate Desire - the mythological object, 1999 included an image of a porcelain statue of Jesus Christ, *Jesus in Pinkitude #1*, 1999 (Fig. 45). This figure was about 80cm tall in reality and had

[164] This was made especially apparent when the work travelled interstate for an exhibition and the movement of travel caused several works to crack.
[165] As described in Appendix 1.2

Fig. 45. *Jesus in Pinkitude #1*, 1999.
Oil and wax on canvas.

hand-painted blue flowers on its tunic. This painting came nearest to achieving the aims of the project thus far. The simple formal rendering of the painted image was designed to deny any discussion of the religious associations of the figurine. Its purpose was to frustrate the viewer into questioning the relevance of this object without acknowledging the true context of it. The exaggerated viewpoint (looking down upon it) also seemed to unsettle its conventional reading.[166]

The next series of work *Jesus in Pinkitude*, 2000 (Fig. 46 & Fig. 47), used only this object as its source and tried to strip down the loaded references of the object further. Abstract shapes derived from the cut-out shadow and then from cut-outs made from various parts of the object became the formal devices used to intimidate the spatial reading. These floating cut-outs sat directly on top of the surface of the image as well as hovering in an out of the spatial location. The result of this process created an incongruent spatiality that was flat and dimensional, representational and non-representational, figurative and formal but did not occupy any of these attributes comfortably. It was here that the space of the screen (as isolated by the computer manipulation of images) became a literal device for creating a sense of spatial ambiguity.

[166] The usual convention is that religious icons and figures are looked up at and not looked down upon as in this scenario.

Fig. 46. *White Purgatory*, 2000.
Oil on canvas on board.

Fig. 47. *Blue Purgatory*, 2000.
Oil on canvas on board.

Purgatory

At this juncture an interest ignited in the concept of purgatory. It had surfaced earlier within the first body of work [167] but the religious imagery of the *Jesus in Pinkitude* #1, 1999 brought it to the forefront. In theological discourses,[168] purgatory was an invented place that was constructed as a means of navigating the distance between two poles. These poles or states define dystopian and utopian desires. Titles such as Heaven and Hell, Hades and Nirvana, or Amenti and Valhalla [169]describe these dominions as absolute ideals in spiritual ideology. Purgatory or the third place was created to close the gap between these absolute doctrines espoused by the Christian faith and the singularity of the individual. It is a contrived state that is a hybridization of its

[167] See Appendix 2.1 for the artist's statement *Purgatory*, from the exhibition *Sublime Absence*, Smith and Stoneley Gallery, Brisbane.
[168] Although it is never mentioned in theological texts it became ultimately accepted in popular culture around the twelfth century and was later immortalised in the thirteenth century by Dante Alighieri. In *The Divine Comedy* Dante places purgatory in a real location, somewhere between the darkness of the dystopian state (traditionally perceived as underground) and the lightness of utopian states (traditional perceived as above the sky). He situated purgatory on a mountaintop in the middle of a vast ocean in the Southern Hemisphere directly opposite Jerusalem (32 degrees south). In giving purgatory a specific location just outside the known world Dante was able to construct a Descartian place that existed in the physical realm of matter but also in the immaterial realm of thought and spiritual experience. See Wertheim, M. *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace*, New Zealand, Doubleday, 1999, Chapter One, "Soul-Space".
[169] Bantock, N. *The Museum at Purgatory*, China, Sfumato Graphics, 1999.

ideological parents. Purgatory is unique in that it is an ephemeral space of purification but more importantly it is a place (fictional or not) that describes the "in-between". It names or locates the gap, the aporia or the undesirable interstice that is also the space of "Nothing". It is within this space (conceptually or otherwise) that all the objects within the context of this project (both figurative and abstract) are defined.

This investigation had always considered the idea of "betweenness" or the space of "Nothing" as a central context of the research. It was not until this stage that a clarification of the concept was established and an "absolute limit"[170] or boundary was determined. Unlike the description of purgatory, this research had not established a point of polarity or limitation. The realization of this point had major ramifications for the overall project. The 'right', or most pertinent, objects/figurines still had not been found. The figurine of Jesus had fulfilled the outlined objectives but it did not specifically insinuate a contemporary experience.

Ground Preparation no.2 and the canvas support

Jesus in Pinkitude, 2000

A suitable support that was capable of maintaining the surfaces that had been developed still needed to be found. The flexibility of the canvas support was the major contributor to the problems discussed earlier. I was reluctant, however, to do away with the canvas.[171] The obvious move was to use a non-flexible support such as panel or board. This support was quickly dismissed, as there seemed to be no resistance to hold the brush mark. The resulting surface and finish was too smooth, too flat, and too hard; and this surface did not result in the same pliant evenness and subdued spatial ambiguity of the canvas support. A support somewhere between a panel and canvas or alternatively a canvas surface stretched over a panel support was in order.

[170] See quote by Gerhard Richter at the beginning of Chapter Four, *The Something of "Nothing"*.
[171] There is a sense of fragility about an image painted on canvas, and something very compelling in the way that it may move or wobble; this too, was also intrinsically part of the problem.

This surface at least alluded to the fragility of the plain canvas support although it would never move or wobble.[172]

Outcomes

The resulting panel/canvas supporting ground had the appearance of canvas but the rigidity of panel. It sat somewhere between the two supports yet had the characteristics of both. The modelling compound completed a surface that reduced the drag of the brush and enabled paint to glide easily over the surface without slipping. It allowed some of the weave of canvas to show through and did not produce the same hardness and rigidity of the plain paneled support. It also required less paint preparation.[173] The panel/canvas support enabled the surface to be sanded at any time within the painting process, i.e. from undercoating to final finishes. This ensured a regular, flat result even when major re-working or re-composing of the image was undertaken. It produced a dense surface that held the paint directly on the surface and the overall final finish was soft and malleable. The surface now had the appearance of a flat unified ground but it did not have the same dullness of the plain canvas support. In fact the surface had taken on new characteristics. The enveloping or flat dimensionality was still a prominent feature but the fuzzy or overall blurred finish was sharper. The new support also reduced the chalkiness of the heavily gessoed canvas support and produced a plastic tactility.

From Utopia to Dystopia: little green men, 2000 and the shift in spatiality

The next major work determined the toy soldier as the appropriate object/figurine for the context of this project.[174] *Little green men No. 1*, 2000 (Fig. 48) and *The Purgatorial Perspective*, 2000 (Fig. 49) was first perceived as a 24-paneled work displayed in a corner of a small room.[175] The reasoning was that the size of the work

[172] See Appendix 1.3 for more details on this process.
[173] That is the mid-grey undercoat of the canvas surfaces as described in Appendix 1.3.
[174] See Chapter Seven, *From mythological object to toy soldiers*, for a general discussion on the choice of this object.
[175] This was eventually completed with only 12 panels due to commitments to a touring exhibition. It was included in the exhibition "(painting)" curated for the Plimsoll Gallery by Troy Ruffels and Sarah Ryan.

demanded the viewer stand back from the images, but because of the constraints of the room this was not possible. By limiting the viewing distance, the intention was to force the viewer to only engage with the work up close - a strategy to create a visual sense of vertigo. This strategy was also used to establish movement not only within the painted ground but also within the contextual images. Again an exaggerated viewpoint was used. In this instance, different viewpoints were applied so that the viewer looked down upon and looked up at the figurines. This created a tumbling or cascading spatial relationship in which the toys seemed to hover aimlessly. The flat cut-outs as seen in earlier works also re-appeared. In this work they emerged as the bases of the toys, or again, as individual repeated figurines.

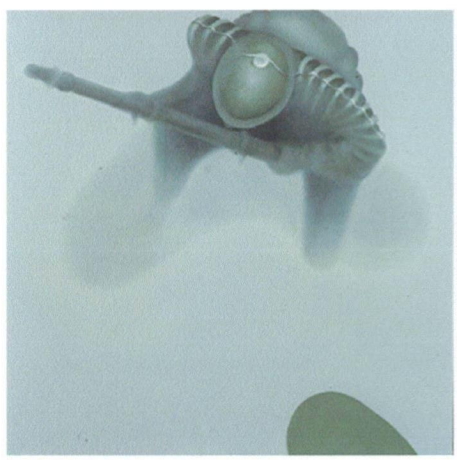

Fig. 48. *Little green men No. 1*, 2000. Oil and wax on canvas.

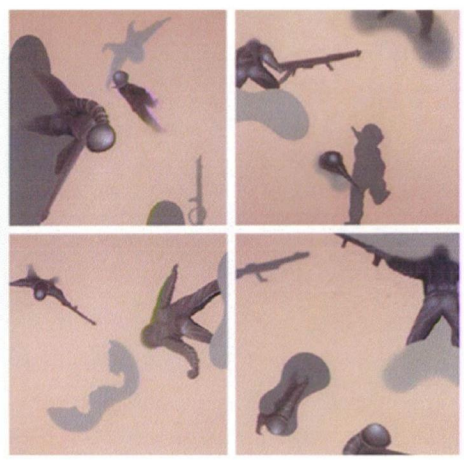

Fig. 49. Detail; *The Purgatorial Perspective. Little green men*, 2000. Oil and wax on canvas.

A shift in spatiality

Little Green Men No. 1, 2000 and *The Purgatorial Perspective*, 2000 had fulfilled all the conceptual aims and studio-based problems proposed thus far. The toy soldier was established as the 'right' object and the pictorial space created a state of uncertainty and modulated tension. It was at this point that a re-thinking of

Fig. 50. Traditional Chinese paper cut-outs.
Red paper.

Such cut-outs[177] usually contained one isolated figure (a peasant or young woman) in a simplistic stylized setting. The setting alluded to a generalized landscape but did not display specific details of location. These paper-cuts could be perceived as illustrations for cultural and political messages.

The works *Invasion*, 2001 (Fig. 51), *Raid*, 2001 (Fig. 52), *Sniper*, 2001 (Fig. 53), *Palm*, 2000 and *Landing*, 2001 borrowed heavily from this style and tradition. In these instances, however, the settings were adapted from historical photographs as well as from traditional cut-outs. The principal examples of this can be identified in *Landing*, 2001 and *Sniper*, 2001 which were constructed after referencing Robert Capa's photographs of a Spanish civil soldier caught mid air by a bullet; *Spain*, 1938, and the series *D-Day Omaha Beach, June 6, 1944*.

[177] Traditionally these paper-cuts were used as decorations adorning windows and doors during festive times such as weddings and New Year celebrations. Traditional motifs included lavishly ornamented lanterns, stylized goldfish, dragons and dancing bears. Some were excessively intricate and others were simple and bold. However, all cut-outs had a common directness; a graphic approach juxtaposed with a naïve stylization. Later in Chinese cultural history they were used as vehicles for political propaganda. Like other propaganda material these literally could be found everywhere. It was the coupling of the decorative and the provocative with the everyday that was of most interest to me. They were at once naïve but sophisticated, traditional but contemporary; and the designs were driven by a handcrafted dexterity that belied their folk art origins. Even the non-political images, such as the double happiness symbol or a dragon entwined around a phoenix, had a conceptual component that transposed them beyond a static image-making technique to a powerful cultural and social artefact (Fig. 50).

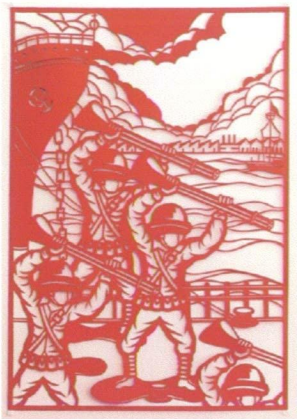

Fig. 51. *Invasion*, 2001.
Red paper.

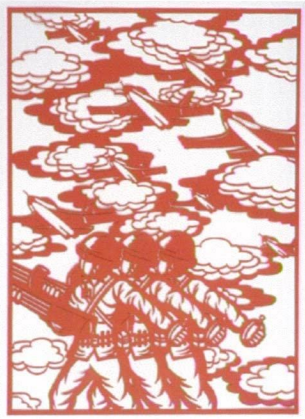

Fig. 52. *Raid*, 2001.
Red paper.

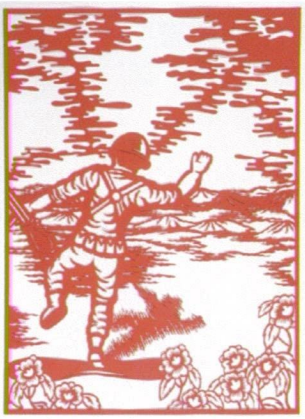

Fig. 53. *Sniper*, 2001.
Red paper.

The second series of paper-cuts were more formal in design. They did not rely on *mis-en-scène* to construct narrative but used the silhouetted shape as the principal pictorial device. Works such as *Dispenser #1-5*, 2001, *Wheel of Fortune*, 2001 and *The Long March*, 2001 (Fig. 54), were produced by repeating a single

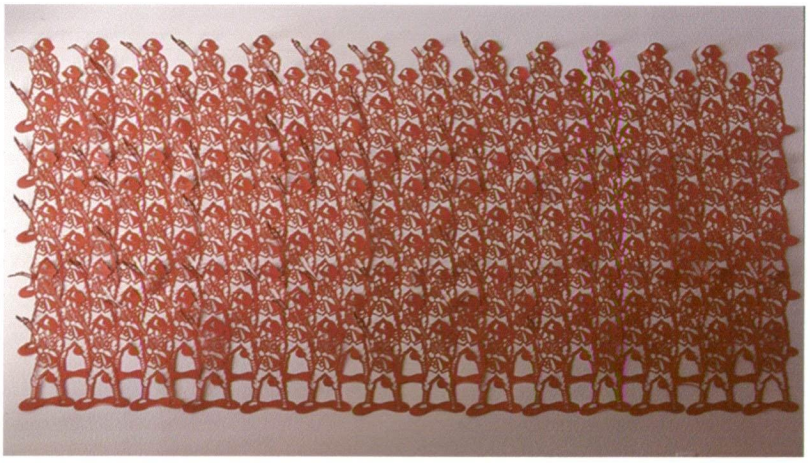

Fig. 54. *The Long March*, 2001.
Red paper.

toy soldier motif in a variety of constructions. Although I deemed these works more successful as isolated pieces than the narrative based images, they did not seem to question the figure/ground relationship of my principal objective. Two smaller works *Untitled*, 2001 (Fig. 55), also made during this period took the formal elements of *Dispenser*, 2001 and *The Great March*, 2001 with the other non-narrative based pieces and tried to push the boundary of

the figure/ground relationship. Figures emerged out of abstract paper shapes, with some becoming positive reliefs, while

Fig. 55. *Untitled*, 2001.
Red paper.

others negative. Strangely enough I considered these works to be the least successful as paper cut-outs but they exhibited some of the spatial characteristics of the narrative works without the *mis-en-scène*. It was these qualities that became the significant characteristics that influenced the painted images.

Paper Cut-outs

Jesus in Pinkitude, 2000 and *Different Reds*, 2001

The paper cut-out first became a strategy in the studio during the construction of the works in the series *Jesus in Pinkitude*, 2000. Shapes cut out from various parts of rendered objects were used to disrupt the surface depth. These appeared as shadows or silhouettes that floated uneasily within the pictorial space. These abstract forms were pieces of scrap paper roughly coloured and shaped and placed on the surface of the paintings as a temporary device to re-compose images. The working images were still being constructed within PhotoShop and transformed onto the canvas using an epidiascope, but during the translation between printed images, and through the course of painting, some spatial developments began to take place (i.e. distortion and elongation from the epidiascope). The paper-cut was enlisted as a quick solution to help resolve many of the problems arising in the translation from computer print-out to painting. They soon took on a greater significance in the general composing and construction process. Working through the PhotoShop techniques the 'cut and paste' tools

had always driven much of the constructing processes. The paper shapes created a collaged, layered aesthetic. Although the 'look' or the flat/enveloping aesthetic of a computer-generated image was still noted, all the images were now constructed through the use of cut paper shapes, masks and deep etched photographs and objects. The pictorial space sat closer to the surface and began to protrude out from the surface of the picture plane.

The process of the paper-cut is a simple one.[178] A drawing is made on the back of paper and negative and positive spaces are cut out to form the final image using a knife and a small pair of scissors. Like the cut and paste tools of PhotoShop the negative space of the cut paper surface becomes both figure and ground. The blurred boundary of the figure/ground relationship is further escalated when the perforated image is mounted upon a window. At this point the paper frames the view of the window and the negative space is dynamic and active. When mounted on a wall the shadows produced by the delicate filigree becomes the active part and animates the void of the cut paper.

Outcomes

Different Reds, 2001

The underlining context of the paper-cut images was essentially the same as the painted images. Some techniques that were successful, as cut-out images did not necessarily transpose to the painted surfaces.[179]The paper cut-outs major influence on the painted images was in the construction and manipulation of the figure/ground relationship. The pictorial space in the cut-out is

[178] As a medium, the paper-cut hovers somewhere between object and image. The surface is at once flat but the physicality of the paper adds another spatial dimension. The shadow is introduced as an influential but chance element in the technique. The imagery itself is defiant and flatly rendered and the directness of the medium lends itself to formal abstract representation. There is also a peculiar tension between the machine-like mark of the knife and the activity of manufacture, as the regular, graphic surface denies the touch of the handcrafted action.

[179] One such example of this was the impulse to give the motifs a history, setting or location. These things had been purposely avoided within the larger objectives of the painterly works. One of the aims of the research project is to investigate ideas pertaining to contemporary indifference such an indifference or ambiguity cannot be defined or located within any cultural setting or *mis-en-scène*. Therefore this particular type of rendering was never considered appropriate for the painted images.

obviously more frontally placed and compressed. This did not necessarily reduce the spatial awareness of the images, only notably altered it. Other formal characteristics such as repetition, rhythm and decoration, and rigid layering or tessellation of figures have also been translated directly from the paper cut-outs to the painted images.

The Ballet of Nothing More, 2002 and a New Spatiality

The surface depth of these images is closer in relationship to the paper cut-outs than the first computer generated images. The space is flatter, shallower, and compressed. Planes of colour and shape are layered on top of one another to create a compact space tighter in dimension. Rather than resorting to an enveloping deep space, that suggests a psychological mediation, the surface space has the appearance of a collage.[180] The space fabricates a visual dislocation in the flattening out of surface; it sits forward within the picture plane and brings the detail closer to the viewer. The flatness of the overall compositions has an intensity or anxiety that escalates the emotive content of the subject because it insinuates a simplistic or reductive allusion to it.

These images use fragmented parts of toy soldiers and silhouettes, which are flat and rendered in a variety of spatial paradigms. These parts float on top of raw canvas and flat planes of colour. They fabricate a segmented dance sequence that is at once static but rhythmical. In *Celebration, 2002* (Fig. 56), legless and headless bodies bob around in a shallow ground, banishing rifles over absent heads. In *He 's got the whole world in his hands,* 2002 (Fig. 57), rendered arms and silhouetted legs sit at right angles from the picture plane; the repeated shape of the arms appears as negative and positive space and is reminiscent of the text bubbles within comic strip imagery.

[180] Clement Greenberg describes the space of collage as a "reverse-depth" which is literally the building up of the space, outwards from the surface, rather than receding into it.

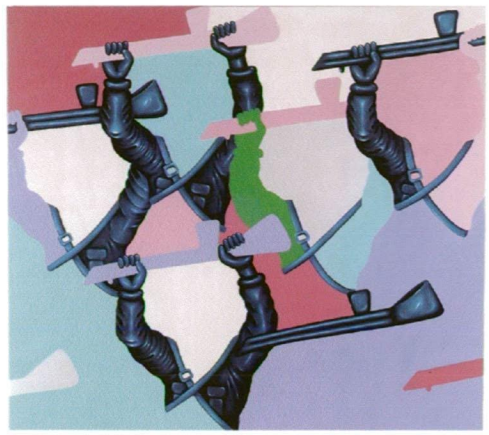

Fig. 56. *Celebration*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

Fig. 57. *He's got the whole world in his hands*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

In *What the world needs now*, 2002 (Fig. 58), the central figures are rendered in volume as well as flatly, they march across the surface of the image with extended arms pushing against the picture plane. The movement is circular; and the figures go nowhere. This anticipates the action also inherent in the painted surface - the endless oscillation between the pearl surface and raw canvas. They are intentionally awkward and intentionally odd. The reduction is sophisticated but dumb and in the dumbness lies ambivalence.

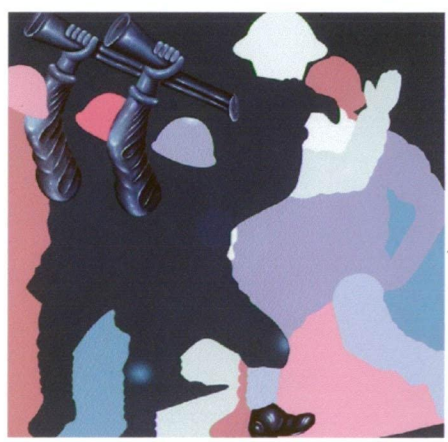

Fig. 58. *What the world needs now*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

Fig. 59. *I wanna dance with some body*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

In *I wanna dance with some body*, 2002 (Fig. 59), the figurative element is confined to legs. These are repeated as if in a chorus line. The helmets are reduced to a simple flat shape and float in and out of the raw canvas ground. *Up where we belong*, 2002 (Fig. 60), again uses the same floating helmets, but here, they are rendered as if manufactured out of plastic. These sit on and within the pictorial plane and the camouflage pattern becomes both figure and ground, in *Angel of mourning*, 2002 (Fig. 61), one lone arm escapes the *logo-like* figures while boots float across the surface plane.

Fig. 60. *Up where we belong*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

Fig. 61. *Angel of mourning*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

The Pearl Surface

After considering the effect of the negative space and compressed spatiality within the paper-cut images I went back to look at the white space of the computer screen. This space is produced when no background is inserted into a PhotoShop image, or when a section of an image is deleted. The white light of the screen jumps forward and places other elements within the image in an uncertain

location.[181] The resulting white void is positive and negative; it is endless and flat; and when compared to the paper cut-outs it also functioned as a hole or vacuum within the picture plane. This vacuum pushes outwards as it pulls inwards and the constant movement between in *and* out, positive *and* negative, void *and* explosion caused an apprehensive reading of the pictorial content.

A series of photographs and slides of toy soldiers were taken during this period to be used as source material. The toys were laid out on a light box so that an even disperse of light was achieved. The figurines were photographed horizontally so that the appearance of foreshortening and flare was removed.[182] The figurines on the light box produced a similar result to the white void of the computer screen. This white space in combination with the object created an ambivalent pictorial space. The light of the screen became the influence for constructing a similar painterly surface.[183]

Mica glaze

The initial experimentation to create a painterly surface that operated in the same way as the white space of the screen began with using metallic paints.[184] The next experimentation looked at pearlescent paints for possible solutions.[185] The objectives were to eliminate the white

[181] This particular characteristic is also noted within Fabian Marcaccio's *Paint-Zone L.A. #5, 1995*. See Chapter Two, *Painting and the Technological Screen,* for a detailed description of this work.
[182] These images were intended to be used to enlarge the figures so that the small details could be viewed with clarity when working in the studio over long periods of time.
[183] Like the computer screen, the painted surface had the appearance of reflecting ambient light, even when the studio light was turned out. The objective of this glaze was to establish a surface that displayed similar characteristics or properties to the white void of the computer screen - it was never intended to mimic that space only participate in the same sense of ambivalence and spatial flux.
[184] A metallic surface contrived the pictorial plane by fluctuating in spatial location according to the way in which the light caught the surface. It could either appear flat and dense *or* translucent and shiny. Silver and gold metallic paint recalled metal surfaces such as steel or aluminum and had other associations that did not fit into the aims of the project. See the description of Andy Warhol's Elvis series in Chapter Four for further insight to how metallic paint can alter spatial articulation.
[185] Both Archival and Windsor and Newton make a pearlescent white oil-based paint but the main mixing compound in both of these paints is titanium oxide, which is opaque. Also, this paint was gritty, and there was no control over the levels of pearl and opaqueness.

colouring from the pearlescent paint and make a metallic-type paint without any colour. It was established that mica[186] was the compound used to achieve the metallic-like finish in similar paints. A supply of pure mica pigment was required so that experimentation with levels of illumination and whiteness could be determined.[187]

A cosmetic company in Sydney[188] was sourced that was able to supply small samples (approximately 100 grams) of different quality mica.[189] After conducting experiments with approximately 15 different types of pigment, a pigment known as Flamenco Ultra Fine +13 was settled upon. It had the right level of pearliness; it was very translucent; it was fine and non-gritty; and it did not have to be ground down further.[190] It did not dissolve when mixed with other viscous mediums. This mica could be bought in manageable quantities from a raw cosmetic material supplier also located in Sydney.[191] The next level of experimentation began in the studio and required transforming the raw pigment into a substance than could be used like oil paint. Initial experiments were conducted using various types of mediums

[186] Mica is a generic term used for a group of aluminosilicate minerals. These minerals are from the silicate of aluminum grouping containing other elements of potassium, magnesium, iron, sodium fluorine and lithium. It ranges in colour from completely transparent to jet-black and it can be split into sheet or plate films as thin as one micron in thickness. In this sheet format it is completely colourless. It is a stable and inert mineral, which makes it ideal to mix with solvents, oils, alkaline solutions etc. It is fireproof incombustible and non-flammable and can be exposed to incredibly high temperatures. It is also incredibly soft and can be hand-cut, hand-ground or machined. It is flexible, elastic and tough at the same time. Its principal uses are in electrical insulation such as motors, electrical generators and in television. It is also used in the industrial paint industry and in cosmetics to achieve a translucent, sparkle quality. It is principally mined commercially in India, Africa, China and Brazil.

[187] The initial search began with the industrial painting industry but it was soon established that the mica they used was already pre-mixed into heavily solvent-based solutions that were not compatible with oil-based paints. Mining companies were then contacted but mica could only be sourced from these areas in very large quantities.

[188] This cosmetic company wishes to remain anonymous because the small supplies of mica donated for the initial experimentation came from excess sample stock.

[189] Obtaining incredibly large quantities of mica (tonnes) was easier than locating smaller quantities. There appeared to be several thousand different types of mica, all graded according to translucency, colour, weight and purity. This grading was also dependent on the levels of certain elements present (as noted in footnote 161). The cosmetic company used a small variety of these in grounded pigment form as the base for eye shadows and nail polishes to achieve pearlescent finishes.

[190] Excess grounding of pure mica pigments causes the pearl-like quality to break down.

[191] Bronson and Jacob Pty Ltd, Parkview Dr, Homebush Bay, 2140.

such as linseed oil, wax and even pure turpentine. As all oil-based mediums are not entirely clear (i.e. all forms of vegetable oil are yellow in colour) a slightly off-white finish was settled upon.[192]

Outcomes

The resulting glaze had a tacky viscosity regardless of the amount of liquid added to dilute it. Its working time was very limited. The paint seemed to drag if over-worked and the pigment offered resistance to the brush and the surface of the support. The only remedy for this problem was to apply the glaze as quickly and thinly as possible with a soft wide brush. This is more difficult over larger areas. The surface could be lightly sanded if it picked up excessive dust and wiped back with turpentine, which effectively "softened" the layer and resettled the pigment. It then could be re-coated. The main dilemma with working with a glaze of this type was that it could not be manipulated in the same way as other oil paint. The areas, of pearl surface, needed to be placed in first or added last; and other surfaces applied over the top.. In this way a faultless dense surface is ensured.

Raw Canvas

After concluding the experiments with the mica glaze and considering the effects that it produced the research returned to reconsider the relationships between figure and ground, subject and content. There was still one anxiety regarding the panel/canvas support. Is the canvas necessary? Is there another way to prepare a plain panel support to achieve the desired results? In a final act of questioning, it was decided to make the canvas surface pivotal in the construction of the images.[193]

[192] A thixa-tropic solvent medium was determined rather than a traditional oil-based one because the resulting paint could be made either into a solid and opaque form like paint squeezed straight from the tube. It could be diluted with more artists' turpentine and damar varnish to produce a very thin glaze. This medium has a gel-like consistency, which acts as a levelling agent. The levelling agent became crucial, as the pigment base of the glaze tended to drag when applied to the surface and to hold brush marks. For further details of the process and recipes for the mica glazes see Appendix 1.4.

[193] See Appendix 1.5 for how this process was achieved.

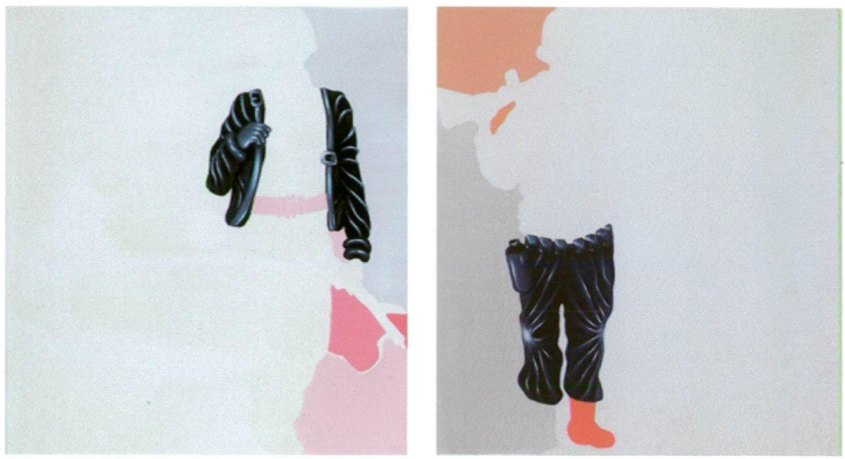

Fig. 62 & 63. *He ain't heavy, he's my brother No. 1 & No. 2*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

In revealing the raw canvas the argument regarding figure/ground relations was again thrust into the forefront. In stripping back the surface the same intentions resulted as in layering the surfaces. At this point the raw canvas became just another colour or ground within the compositions. Yet it functioned on several different levels. In the construction of the images it was used as figure but by its very nature it was ground (Fig. 62 & 63). Its warmth and tonal colouring was closely related to the pearl surface while its matte texture was a counterpart to the luminosity of the pearl.

Constructing the images

All the images in this final series of paintings were composed through rough sketches and drawings. These drawings became 'painterly maps' (Fig. 63) in which areas of raw canvas and pearl surface were pre-determined. Simple shading and labeled areas of the images were noted with numbers. No colour choice was made at this point of the composition.

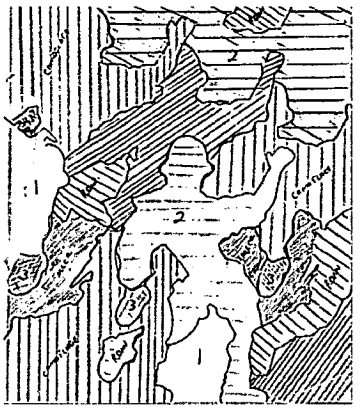

Fig. 64. Painting map, *Untitled,* 2002.
Graphite on paper.

These maps were projected onto the raw stretched canvas and the surface was prepared as described in Appendix 1.3 and 1.5. Block areas of colour and rendered shapes and armatures were placed in quickly so that the image could be perceived as a whole. At this point the painting map was discarded and the image was resolved through the observation and engagement with the painterly information. Once this was finalized, areas of mica glaze were layered on the appropriate areas, and then lastly the final layers of colour, detail and highlights were added.

The pearl surface was constructed as a mechanism for distancing the viewer from the content of the figures. It functions as a visual block or blind spot with its seductive and illuminative qualities. It also has a precious quality about it. This is a condition of its elusive nature. When the surface is not reflecting light, it is completely lost. It becomes just another surface that is hard to register. The colourlessness conveys the grimness and the emptiness of the contemporary situation - a lack of hope or desire to overcome insurmountable odds whilst the illumination expresses the paradoxically opposite intention; it bestows upon the image a supernatural or transcendental character, on which all hope and desire is hinged. In this way the surface can deny the complexity of contemporary experience by simplifying it to a construction of

extremes - an act of turning something off or on; or choosing heads or tails; being there or not there.

Fig. 65. Andy Warhol, *Camouflage*, 1986.

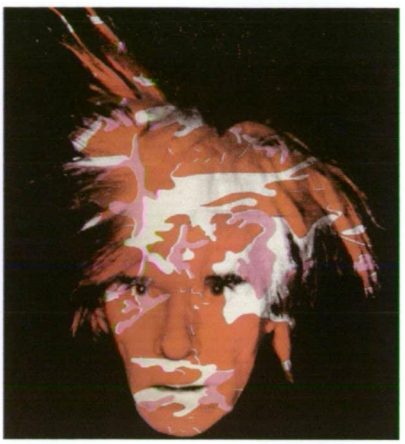

Fig. 66. Andy Warhol, *Self-portrait*, 1986.

Camouflage patterning was another device enlisted to unsettle the spatiality of these images. This pattern singularly reiterates many of the aims of the project. That is; it is both a pattern and a cultural artefact; it is decorative and functional. The decorative nature of the pattern is used to over-power or complicate the military allusion. The pictorial space within the pattern expands outwards and alludes to fractal notations - as the microscopic unit within a macroscopic design. As a formal pattern it is never clear what elements are figurative and what elements are ground. Like Andy Warhol's abstract camouflages and camouflage portraits, (Fig. 65), this popular decorative pattern is both abstract and representation. The use of the pattern alludes to the historical context of the design but more deliberately, it masks or screens the illusion of reality and reduces it to an appropriated formal motif. Within *The Ballet of Nothing More*, the "historically burdened design"[194] becomes another strategy to unsettle the pictorial space of the imagery and to push the viewer closer to the " loaded " context of the toy soldiers. Like Warhol' s *Self-Portrait* , 1986 (Fig. 66), the camouflage pattern in *Stand by your Man*, 2002 (Fig. 67), looks like a disease that is slowly taking over the body of the soldier. In

[194] Kellein, Thomas. (ed.) *Andy Warhol; Abstracts*, Munich, New York, Prestel, 1993, p.21.

Fig. 67. *Stand by your man*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

Fig. 68. *Hey you, get off my cloud*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

some areas it has exploded with colour as if a new pestilence has emerged. In other works *Hey you, get off my Cloud #2*, 2002 (Fig. 68), the pattern is no longer flat but has become object. It looks almost plastic as it floats across the surface in an unfixed location. The camouflage in *She bangs*, 2002 (Fig. 73), covers the entire painted surface. It is both figure and ground; and it changes shape and intensity as it moves across the surface. While, in other works still, *You light up my life, 2002* (Fig. 69); the pattern is exaggerated and distorted so that it appears to form another figure or as in *Darling, it hurts*, 2002, the pattern is both ground and figure, pattern and object (Fig. 70).

The lens flare or hot spot is another strategy that is employed to shift a conventional articulation of the pictorial space. See *Too much heaven*, 2002 (Fig. 71). This device was lifted straight from the PhotoShop program. By simply applying a highlight to a flat shape it is possible to render that shape with a degree of volume. The volume of the object, however, does not sit comfortably. It is no longer flat but it does not have the same weight or dimensionality as a fully rendered object. It sits somewhere between the two states. Within its spatial limbo it floats into and out of the painterly plane.

Fig. 69. *You light up my life*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

Fig. 70. *Darling, it hurts*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

These works are also named after popular songs[195] (Fig. 72). They are titled in such a way because the sentiment and emotion of these songs are equally cliché *and* empty. They rely on associations rather than true context yet they have a universal appeal and

Fig. 71. *Too much heaven*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

Fig. 72. *It's not unusual*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

are easily recognizable. The flippancy of the titles is again a strategy to undermine the loaded figurines. In combination with the pseudo military motif they too become an anomaly as they try to divert the viewer's attention from the true context of the project.

[195] These songs are not current but again like the toy soldiers were popular in the recent past.

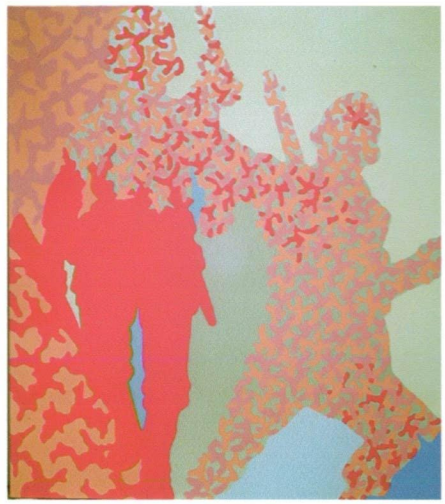

Fig. 73. *She bangs*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

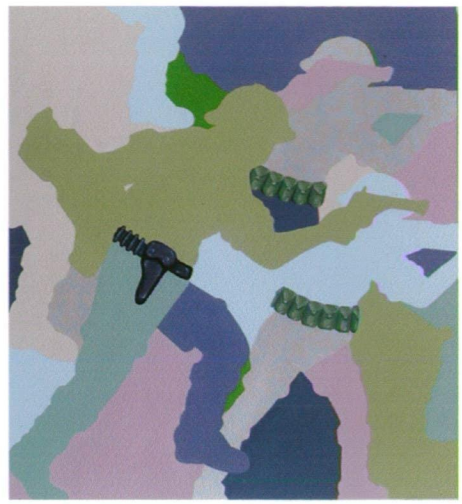

Fig. 74. I *still haven't found what I am looking for*, 2002.
Oil and mica on canvas on board.

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

Through an examination of traditional and contemporary painting practices this project argues an alternative analysis of painterly pictorial space and establishes the screen as an important influence within its development and articulation. The screen, by definition, subverts a vision of reality by using the strategies of framing, confinement, filtration and display. This research also proposes an original interpretation of contemporary experience as one defined by ambivalence and anxiety. It presents an innovative explanation to some of the perceived shifts within visual culture and locates this analysis within the representational methodologies of the screen.

The significant outcomes of this project are apparent as original conceptual, technical and practical contributions within the field of contemporary painting.

The research was initiated through a practical studio-based investigation that suggested three areas of influence: the screen as a metaphorical interpretation; the screen as a literal painterly boundary; and the flat/deep space of the screen. The practical strategies developed to implement the representational methodologies of the screen are seen in a resulting ambivalent spatial construction. This condition is suggested in painterly works as a circular movement in which objects and detail are displaced within and on the pictorial plane. They include: the concurrent use of a variety of spatial paradigms; decoration (camouflage patterning); the cut-out silhouette; an original paint surface (the mica glaze/ pearl surface); densely coloured surfaces; the lens flare or hotspot; exposing the raw canvas; and an overall sense of spatial compression.

The toy soldier - as an allusion to contemporary ambivalence - was employed as the main protagonist for the metaphorical boundary of the screen. By alluding to a context of subversion, violence and confrontation, this decoy implied an association with the military and propaganda. It provided an instantly recognizable motif, as it recalled current world events and the pantomime of

childhood role -playing. Like Lisa Yuskavage's doll-like women or Louise Hearman's enigmatic creatures, the toy figures became the point of entry from which the viewer is lured into the awkward painting space. Once inside the space of the painting, the figures and other pictorial devices, unsettle and disorientate the viewer. It is here that the metaphorical screen manifests itself. The metaphorical screen then, is the principal strategy used to imply the association of engagement and disengagement within the response of the viewer, between the allusion to world events and childish game playing. This screen is also apparent in the plastic rendering of the toy parts in conjunction with other formal elements such as flat cut -out shapes. It, too, can be seen in the pearl surface - that is in the precious, desirable, metallic nature of the paint - which first invites, then distances an engagement with the pictorial surface.

In earlier work too, the metaphorical screen was implicit in the 'leading edge' or exaggerated viewpoint of the rendered objects and figurines.[196] Like Caravaggio, who also pushed his figures right to the edge of the picture surface, these figures almost escape from their painterly ground and fall out of their illusionary plane. Although these images are not narrative, the blank atmospheric spaces are both poignant and passive. In this undescribed and unlocatable ground, the journeying from one realm to another is presented.

The tactile and tangible atmosphere of this ground is also derived from the influences of the screen. The screen as a literal painterly boundary is evident in the heavily waxed surfaces of these early works. The wax diffuses the surface of the paintings and places a physical boundary between the viewer and the rendered object. This boundary separates the external reality of the real world and the internal illusion of the world of the painted image.

In *The Ballet of Nothing More,* the screen as a literal painterly boundary is more than a single physical barrier that separates the viewer and the illusion of the painted image. The painted illusion of the camouflage pattern, the pearl surface, the cut-out silhouettes,

[196] The 'leading edge' was a device used in the bodies of works *Inanimate Desire; the mythological object,* 1999 and *The Purgatorial Perspective,* 2000. See Chapter Eight for further explanation and images.

the rendered parts and the overall compressed spatiality are all painterly devices that function concurrently to subvert the true context of the images[197] - "Nothingness". In combination these practical strategies produce images that mask an engagement with contemporary experience and filter an abstracted interpretation of a loaded context .

Both collectively and separately these strategies become the literal painterly boundary. In stripping back the painted surface to reveal the raw canvas support, the screen of painterly illusion is exposed. Unlike, the work of Richard Patterson or Chuck Close, the plane of intersection is not singular or fixed. The plane of the screen in *The Ballet of Nothing More*, although compressed and compact, is layered. This layered screen is both penetrable and impenetrable. At one point it draws the viewer in and, then almost inconspicuously, pulls them out again. It is here that the circular movement of spatiality is initiated. Like the recognition of the masonite support within Louise Hearman's work the illusion of painterly image dissolves away as the viewer is caught trying to decipher how the surface was constructed rather than engaging with the overall image.[198] The exposed canvas unveils the painterly process and all illusion and suspense is lost. Yet, it is not the raw canvas that first captivates the viewer, it is the other seductive devices, the intensity and depth of colour, the richness of paint application, the familiarity of the figures and pattern, the tactility of the rendered toy parts and the alluring pearl surface. Once the raw canvas is perceived, however, the painterly screen is broken, but even in revealing the illusion the viewer is still duped. The viewer is made to feel vulnerable in light of their discovery, as they are never too sure when the screen is a strategical illusion *or* when the screen removes them from that illusion. Hence, the painterly screen corrupts any chance of certainty within perception and association.

[197] In later paintings the recognition of the toy soldier figure becomes less important as the principle protagonist, although there is still an allusion to plasticity and reductive figuration. Within these works, however, the characteristic of military subversion is still apparent. As described within Chapter Four, *The something of "Nothing"* and Chapter Seven, *From mythological object to toy soldier,* the true context of the work is not the toys themselves but the anxiety that is perceived within their articulation.

[198] This point is largely dependant upon the viewing distance of the paintings. Within a certain distance and on a certain angle both the raw canvas and pearl surface appears as just another rendered surface.

The paintings, with their spatial compression and flatness, results in a pictorial space that appears to sit up front or close to the surface of the pictorial plane. This was achieved by abbreviating the toy soldier figurine to its most simplistic and reductive form - the cut-out silhouette.[199] Detail, ornament and decoration are obliterated; yet it is in the deliberate reduction that these figures can be viewed without their loaded 'baggage'- although that baggage is never out of sight. This reductive process initiates the flat/deep space of the screen. The screen subverts an original vision or view through concealment and filtration. This too, however, turns back on itself. By its very nature, the screen alludes to a vision that is removed from the reality of this world, yet in the removal or "de-corporealization" of vision, a new vision is inherited. This new vision is dominant and submissive, abstract and representational, active and passive, flat and dimensional.

The main practical strategies used to allude to the flat/deep space of the screen are the cut-out silhouette (as described above); the pearl surface and the dislocated rendered toy parts. The cut-out silhouette evolved one step further with the lens flare/ hot spot. By adding a highlight to a strategic point, a flat shape took on the appearance of volume; that is, the object became both flat and dimensional. The densely coloured surfaces also alluded to this space - at once they appeared non-descript and empty but concurrently dimensional. This trait was also explicit in the grounds of the early work - the density appeared voluminous and lush as well as vacant. [200]

The pearl surface was developed exclusively to allude to the flat/deep space of the screen. That is, the concurrent illusion of flatness and depth within the white void of the electronic and digital screen. By re-producing or re-inventing the active and passive action of the screen surface, the mica glaze mediated an engagement with the painting surface that was contemporaneously receptive and inactive, seductive and reflective as well as the indescribable states between.

[199] This is the most direct and apparent influence of the screen and was the result of the strategy employed by sixteenth century drawing machines. See Fig. 3 in Chapter One.
[200] This was enhanced by the heavily waxed surface.

The endless motion between paradox and contradiction is inherent in the space of the screen but as exhibited in this research the screen is not a definitive, quantifiable entity. Its influence, although resounding, is difficult to locate and even harder to analyze. As shown in the preceding pages this research suggests that the screen materializes itself in a wide variety of practices but it is never exclusive to any of them. By its nature it continuously contradicts itself.

The objective of this research was never to determine exact and finite strategies that were directly implicit in the qualities of the screen. [201] Instead the methodologies developed were the result of establishing the screen as a pivotal influence in the evolution and articulation of pictorial space. This influence, throughout history, has been seen as a direct manifestation in the construction of perspectival space; however, within current technological developments this influence is far more subjective. Its influence, then, is said to be interpretative and convoluted.

The convoluted influence of the screen has produced a spatiality that polarizes representation and abstraction. Both are now inextricably combined and can no longer be viewed in isolation. As, too, is the concept of flatness. It no longer alludes to a simplistic reduction or internalized vision. In the re-definition of flatness, nothing new is added, only a re-interpretation of what has been already established. It still is experienced as a construct of "doing and being" as well as "interiority " and "self-definition" but it can also be characterized through pluralism and the superficial. Within these contradictory definitions lies the description of "Nothing". "Nothing" is not only the disgorging of content and ideas, but the full potential of those same concepts and ideas. It manifests itself within the intangible, which sits just outside the place of the known. It is a physical and psychological boundary that unsettles everyday acceptance and displaces perception. "Nothing" is concluded to be everything that is yet to be named, everything that is yet to be said and everything that is yet to be done. The something of "Nothing" is everything that is just

[201] Although this does occur with the cut-out silhouette.

beyond our reach. " Nothing", therefore is also considered to be ambivalent; as ambivalence is created within the culture of extremes.

In conclusion, it is deduced that the screen itself is ambivalent and the condition of spatiality that it exhibits is a product of that ambivalence. Within this ambivalence, however, is a unified pictorialism that is homogenized and discordant, analogous and antagonistic. Its vision is cool, detached and removed from the boundaries of the body. It has the capacity to distort reality and re-present a mediated view of the world as one, which is irresolute and inconclusive. The constant state of flux and ephemeral nature of the screen only further exasperates its other paradoxical qualities. Within this reading, contemporary art practices have become the significant sounding ground for the investigation and confrontation of these anxieties. The space of contemporary painting is also located within this area- that is, in the ambivalent, variegated, subjective, subversive space of the screen.

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Fig. 67. Megan Keating, *Stand by your man*, 2002, oil and mica on canvas on board, 165cm x 145cm.

Fig. 68. Megan Keating, *Hey you, get off my cloud* No.2, 2002, oil and mica on canvas on board, 165cm x 145cm.

Fig. 69. Megan Keating, *You light up my life*, 2002, oil and mica on canvas on board, 220cm x 200cm.

Fig. 70. Megan Keating, *Darling it hurts*, 2002, oil and mica on canvas on board, 180cm x 160cm.

Fig. 71. Megan Keating, *Too much heaven*, 2002, oil and mica on canvas on board, 122cm x 115cm.

Fig. 72. Megan Keating, *It's not unusual*, 2002, oil and mica on canvas on board, 122cm x 115cm.

Fig. 73. Megan Keating, *She bangs*, 2002, oil and mica on canvas on board, 145cm x 160cm.

Fig. 74. Megan Keating, *I still haven't found what I am looking for*, 2002, oil and mica on canvas on board, 160cm x 180cm.

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Tell Me A Story, Hobart, Plimsoll Gallery, 1994.

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(painting), Hobart, Plimsoll Gallery, 2000.

Painting at the Edge of the World, Minneapolis, Walker Art Centre, 2001.

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Recent Paintings/ Anne Wallace, Brisbane, Arts Queensland, 1999.

Richard Patterson, New Paintings, New York, James Cohan Gallery, 1999.

Yves Klein, Norway National Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997.

Appendix 1.1

Studio-Practice Methodology

Process of PhotoShop 5.1 manipulation for *Inanimate Desire*, 1999

1. Scan image at 150 dpi (dots per inch).
2. Set image size to 20cm x 20xm.
3. Deep etch object from background.
4. Float object onto a coloured background (colour choice usually corresponded with a sample colour of the original object).
5. Copy original object onto new layer.
6. Fill copied image with a colour 3-4 tonal gradation deeper than chosen background so that object now loses all detail and becomes a flat shape.
7. Reverse flat shape and set behind the original deep etched object so that it appears to be a shadow or silhouette of the original.
8. Soften overall effect with a diffusing filter (usually Gaussian blur)
9. Place *Lens Flare* on top point of object to increase the leading edge.
10. Print using deluxe colour setting at 300dpi on photo-quality inkjet paper.

Appendix 1.2

Process for painterly surface of Inanimate Desire [1]

1. Preparation of support (i.e. 12-14 layers of traditional gesso, sanding between each layer).
2. First ground of oil colour applied (raw umber and titanium white combined to give a warm mid-grey). This ground is applied very thinly and diluted with approximately 1 part colour to 2 parts artist's turpentine. This is allowed to dry and repeated until a uniform surface colour is achieved (usually 3-4 layers depending on the dilution of the colour).
3. Image drawn in using diluted raw umber.
4. Tonal areas built up using more raw umber for darker shadow areas and titanium white for lighter area. The oil paint is used

[1] All quantities are approximated as no amounts are accurately measured and consistency and correct viscosity is measured according to feel and eye. Variables may occurred such as older oil paint may require more dilution than fresher paints or paint may be prepared in jars and further medium added to freshen the viscosity when used at a later date.

straight from the tube and is quite dry and tacky when applied. It is applied using a soft hog's hairbrush with a rounded tip and stippled on to achieve a soft edge.

5. The coloured ground is applied using a flat acrylic brush and drawn over the edge of the object (except in leading edge areas). The coloured ground is usually pre-mixed in an air-tight jar. The first layer is diluted with 1 part artist's turpentine and 1 part oil medium No. 2 or until it forms a viscosity similar to that of well mixed standard acrylic house paint. As subsequent layers are applied the coloured ground is freshened by using more oil medium No. 2. The colour is usually semi-opaque when applied to the painting surface.
6. The object is further built up with areas of colour mixed with oil medium No. 2 and then the coloured ground re-applied drawing slightly across the surface of the object.
7. As the coloured ground is also built up the soft edges are re-applied using the stippling technique in the wet surface of the ground.
8. Step 6 & 7 are repeated until the object is convincingly rendered and the coloured ground is dense and completely flat. The coloured ground usually requires 5-6 layers of semi-opaque colour to achieve a rich density.
9. The final 2 layers of ground colour are applied with 1 part wax medium added to the pre-mixed colour.
10. The final finishing wax glaze is applied which has been slightly coloured with the ground colour. This usually takes 2 coats. One applied from top to bottom and the other applied from left to right. This is applied in continuous brushstrokes all starting and finishing from the same side so that no brush mark or reflection occurs on the surface of the images.
11. Final highlights added and glazing on the leading edge.

Appendix 1.3

Process for construction of panelled canvas supports (for larger scale works)[2]

1. Build flat support by using 3mm marine ply backed by 32mm x 42mm radiata-pine frame. Add cross braces where necessary. The frame is glued and nailed to marine ply.
2. Punch nails and fill holes and seams with plastic wood.
3. Sand marine ply surface thoroughly.
4. Undercoat marine ply with at least 2 coats of acrylic-based paint with light sand between each layer.

[2] For smaller work (under 1 meter square) use 3mm MDF and 19mm x 32mm radiata pine.

5. Stretch 12 ounce cotton duck canvas over support in traditional manner.
6. Using a large painting spatula apply 2 coats of acrylic modelling compound over canvas surface to form a thin and even layer. Sand with an electric sander between each layer.
7. Apply up to 4 coats of commercial gesso in traditional manner, sanding well between each layer.

Appendix 1.4

Recipes for Pearl surface

Mica Glaze No.1
Mix well in an air-tight container
1 part Flamenco Ultra Fine Pigment
1 part clear oil paint
2 parts artist's turpentine

Mica Glaze No.2
Mix well in an air-tight container
1 part Flamenco Ultra Fine Pigment
1 part clear oil paint
1 part artist's turpentine
1 part damar varnish

1. Prepare area to be painted with 2 layers of titanium white oil paint diluted with artist's turpentine, 1 part paint to 1 part turpentine.
2. Lay surface to be painted on a horizontal plane.
3. Using a large soft watercolour brush apply a thin layer of the mica glaze No.1 working very quickly with all brushstrokes moving in the same direction. Do not re-work the surface.
4. Allow to dry thoroughly (usually 2 days).
5. Re-apply Mica Glaze No.1, as per step 3, working brushstrokes in an opposite direction.
6. If surface has drag marks sand lightly with 1000 grit sandpaper and wipe down with a soft lint-free cloth moist with artist's turpentine. This process will reduce grit and dust in surface as well.
7. Continue to re-apply mica glaze No.1 as indicated (approximately 15 -30 times) or until surface is no longer translucent.
8. The final 3-5 coats of glaze use mica glaze No.2 to increase the luminosity of the surface. Continue until surface is suitably dense.

Appendix 1.5

Process for revealing raw canvas.

1. Stretch clean unprimed canvas over prepared board as per Appendix 1.3.
2. Using a large painting spatula squeegee a thin layer of acrylic gel impasto medium over the surface of the unprimed canvas.
3. Sand lightly.
4. Sketch out desired image, by projecting 'painting map' with epidiascope.
5. Cover area to be left raw with adhesive contact (spraying raw canvas spray adhesive for extra stickiness).
6. Cut out mask with sharp blade, making sure that the pencil mark of the desired shape is just outside the area of the mask.
7. Using painting spatula squeegee 2 layers of modelling compound over the entire surface. When approaching the masked area make sure the squeegee starts on the mask and then moves onto the raw canvas so that a seal is formed and the edges are not disrupted.
8. Sand lightly between each layer.
9. Apply up to 4 layers of commercial gesso to the surface, sanding between each layer (image may need to be pencilled in after each application of gesso).
10. Leave contact mask on the painting surface until the painting is complete to give projection to the raw surface.

Appendix 2.1

Purgatory

Artist's Statement
Sublime Absence, Smith and Stonely Gallery, Brisbane

Purgatory is the in-between space that shelters intangible notions such as fate, destiny and desire; it has no structure; it has no shape; nor is it dimensional. It is however the temporal resting ground before the void of the unknown, at once full of potential and as empty as a black hole. It is the space in which the imagination and the narrative impulse run free. The objects that are suspended here are the guardians of everything and nothing. They are the souvenirs of what has been and what is to come.

Oct 1998

Appendix 2.2

Inanimate Desire- the mythological object

Artist's Statement
Linden Gallery, Melbourne Australia.

The house was empty until I began to look at it.
Above the fireplace the residue of 60 years of living had marked a resting-place for three plaster ducks. An old bus timetable was still stuck to the inside of the breadbin, adjustments to the schedule were scratched in over the top of the old. The 733 had stopped running altogether somewhere between 1964 and the introduction of an express service. The sticky tape that held it in place had gone brown with age and lost its stickiness. The yellow nylon toilet dolly still looked over her domain although she had seen better days; her crocheted frock was dusty and soiled.
My grandmother used to crochet and my mother hated it. When she came to visit a nylon fairy would miraculously appear on the back of the cistern and just as quickly disappear again. I could never get my fat fingers to move that quickly.
Under the house was a rifle rack. I'm not sure if it has been hidden there or was an intentional oversight. Behind the skirtingboards I found empty shells and lots of playing cards. The odour seemed to be in all the cupboards.
I got rid of them.
Sometimes if I stand very still in a corner I can still smell it. I know the cat smells it.
She thought she heard someone call her name but when she awoke she was alone. Just because it is morning did not mean she had to eat breakfast.
She remembers, in early winter the red light of the eternal flame flickering and how cross her mother was the day it stopped. She tried not to look at it when she walked into the room; often closing one eye as she walked past it. She was frightened by it at first but then she grew accustomed to it being there, and it was strangely comforting. Her mother would come home and light a candle next to it. She could never understand why it was on top of the bookshelf.

In the lounge the clock strikes, she does not notice it anymore, children are playing outside and she tells herself that she must pay the electricity bill. On the fridge is a postcard picture of an exotic place. She thinks it is an exotic place because she has never been there but she does not really want to either. When her husband was alive they had gone to Tasmania for a holiday; they had seen a wallaby on the side of the road. It was a road kill.

The year after that they decided to refurbish the living room, she remembers arguing over the colour choice, finally settling on the one neither would admit to liking. Who chooses the name for colours? Must they all have a name? Barely Beige was not beige at all but grey and she felt silly telling the assistant at the hardware store she wanted Moroccan Temptation; her husband would never consent to it anyway. They always ended up choosing something called Misty Morn.

Someone would come in to look after the garden for her.

I can see now that it would have been a very congenial place to live.

The neighbours said her daughter was contrary although not unkind, they do not know whether she is dead.

I hope she likes the colour I painted the hall, it's called Havana Sunrise.

September 1999.

Curriculum Vitae

Education:

1997 Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours (1st Class), University of Tasmania
1994 Diploma of Fine Arts, National Art School, Institute of Technology, East Sydney
1990 Diploma of Graphic Design, School of Visual Art, East Sydney

Solo Exhibitions:

2001 *Different Reds*, Gallery 4a, Asia-Australia Arts Centre, Sydney
Zhong Guo Jewel, The Lounge, Casula Powerhouse, Sydney
Paper Play, Smyrnios Gallery, Melbourne and arts@work, Hobart
Chinese Thoughts, Fine Arts Gallery, University of Tasmania
2000 *Xiaojie Looka Looka*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Beijing, PRC
The Purgatorial Perspective, Foyer Gallery, Hobart
1999 *Inanimate Desire- the mythological object*, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
Once Loved, Fine Arts Gallery, Hobart
1998 *A Silent View- Scenes from A Passing Epoch*, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston
1997 *Schema*, Gallery Dunce, Hobart

Selected Group Exhibitions:

2002 *Hobart Art Prize*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
2001 *Alice Springs Art Prize*, The Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs
Hutchins Art Prize, The Long Gallery, Hobart
Conrad Jupiter Art Prize, Gold Coast Arts Centre, Gold Coast
Members Exhibition, Gallery 4a, Asia-Australia Arts Centre, Sydney
2000 *(painting)*,Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, Fine Arts Gallery, Launceston, Monash Gallery, Melbourne
1999 *Liquid Evasions- Flirting with the surface*, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart
Sublime Absence, Smith and Stoneley Gallery, Brisbane

The Churchie Emerging Art Prize, Anglican Church Grammar School, Brisbane
Preview: New Emerging Artists, Nisart Gallery, Launceston
Trust Bank Art Award, Launceston
Overview, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
CAST Summer Show, CAST Gallery, Hobart

1998 *Past Tense/ Future Perfect,* Craftwest, Perth and Centre of Contemporary Craft, Sydney
"you might just forget," Smith & Stoneley Gallery, Brisbane
CAST Summer Show, CAST Gallery, Hobart
Trust Bank Art Award, Launceston

1997 *Exit,* CAST Gallery, Hobart
Helen Lempriere NSW Travelling Art Scholarship, Artspace, Sydney
Trace, Group exhibition, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart
Kissing the Blue Tongue, Group exhibition, Side Space Gallery, Hobart
Trust Bank Art Award, Launceston

1996 *NSW Travelling Art Scholarship,* COFA Gallery, Sydney
Fire and Steel, Queenstown, Tasmania
The Three-man Show, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart
The Body, Side Space Gallery, Hobart
Signatures, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart

Awards:

2002 Hobart Art Prize, People's Choice Award
2000 Asialink Residency, Beijing Art Academy
1998 Australian Postgraduate Award (Ph.D. scholarship)
Pat Corrigan Artist Grant
1997 Trust Bank Art Awards (highly commended)
Finalist NSW Travelling Art Scholarship (highly commended)

Commissions:

1997 Art in Public Buildings Project, Arts Tasmania, Oglivie High School, Hobart

Conference Papers:

Aug 2001 Asia and Australia, Trading In Imagination, University of Wollongong
Sept 2000 *Here and Now,* Beijing Academy of Art, Beijing, PRC

Selected Bibliography:

Aitken, Penelope, "Megan Keating- Artist in Residence", *Generation Asia,* Issue 16, Melbourne, Sept 2001.

Carroli, Linda, "Trademark: Roderick Bunter, You Just Might Forget: Sarah Ryan and Megan Keating, 12 rooms...12 vacancies: Tracy Cooper, Surface: curated by Edwina Bartleme", *Eyeline Magazine*, No. 39 Autumn/ Winter, Brisbane, 1999.

Combs, Nicole, "Asian Artnotes", *Art Monthly Australia*, Canberra, Oct 2000.

Feng, Jing, "Megan Keating Art Exhibition", *Beijing Review*, Beijing 18 Dec, 2000.

Hutchinson, Carrie. "Vertical Challenge", *Vogue Apartment Living*, No.2, 2001.

Knights, Mary. review, *Artlink*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Adelaide, 1997.

Kubler, Alison, "(You make me feel) mighty real", *Art Monthly Australia*, No. 130 June 2000.

Lamb, Eve, "Science's window into art", *The Mercury Newspaper*, Hobart, July 24, 1997.

McIntyre, James, "Summertime Subtleties", *The Examiner Newspaper*, Launceston, 6 Feb, 2000.

Rankin-Reid, Jane, "Days are too short at the Long Gallery", *The Sunday Tasmanian*, Hobart, Oct 28, 2001.

Tain, Wei, "Using Inner Soles, Megan Keating Expresses Her Feelings", *China Woman's Daily*, Beijing, Dec 6, 2000.

Catalogues:

Ball, Jessica; Shaw, Anjanette, *Liquid Evasions*, exhibition catalogue, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 1999.

Kent, Trish, *Past Tense/ Future Perfect*, exhibition catalogue, Craftwest Centre for Contemporary Craft, Perth, 1998.

Ruffles, Troy; Ryan, Sarah, *(painting)*, exhibition catalogue, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 2000.

Stoneley, Renai, *Sublime Absence* exhibition catalogue Smith & Stoneley Gallery, Brisbane, 1999.

Collections:

Artbank
Australian Embassy Beijing
Institute of Technology Sydney
University of Sydney
Private Collections